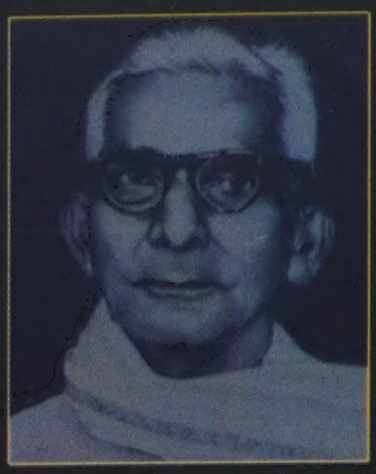
TALE OF NARAYANA THE IMPOSTOR

Polali Sheenappa Hegde

English Translation of an early modern Tulu story by

B. Surendra Rao & K.Chinnappa Gowda

Karnataka Tulu Sahithya Academy



Amunanje Guttu Polali Sheenappa Hegde (1890-1966) is fondly remembered as one of those who heralded, with people like S.U. Paniyady, N.S. Kille and others, the Renaissance of Tulu in the early decades of the twentieth century. He was, like his associates, an ardent nationalist and a Gandhian, and was duly hosted by the British in their jails. He was also one of the earliest historians of Tulunadu, who recognised the value of its rich folklore as couched in the *pāḍdanas* and Siri *sandhi*. He was a great devotee of Polali Rajarajeshwari temple, which he expressed in collecting and collating its *sthalapurāna* and publishing it as *Pulināpura Mahātme*. His other works include *Prācheena Tulunādu*, *Akkarasu Poonjedi Sandhi*, which is a prose reconstruction of the *Siri pad-dana* in Kannada, *Tuḷuvāla Baliyēndra*, *Bangārdangida Kathe*, *Ajjerana Maṇḍala Madipu*, and of course, *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe*. The last one, translated here into English, is a longish short story, ostensibly borrowed from the *Panchatantra*, which has been brilliantly padded up with rich details of Tulu history and culture, so much so, it has deservedly been spoken of as a kind of cultural glossary of Tulunadu.

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The President's Words

The Tulu Academy wants to continue the long tradition of publishing Tulu works of substance, including journals and children's books. We also want to pursue the mission of popularising the study of Tulu at the school level and make it a worthy academic language. We plan to sponsor translations of books from other languages to Tulu and of Tulu works into other languages. This excellent translation of Polali Sheenappa Hegde's *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* as *Tale of Narayana the Impostor* is one such effort. I congratulate the translators, B. Surendra Rao and K. Chinnappa Gowda, for their excellent work and thank them for allowing us the pleasure and privilege of publishing it. I thank all the members of the Academy for supporting me in all my endeavours, including the publication of this work. I thank the Registrar of the Academy, Sri Chandrahasa Rai, for helping me in every way. I thank Kallur Nagesh of Aakrithi Prints for the neat and elegant printing of the book.

Mangaluru **A.C. Bhandari**
10th March 2019 President
Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy, Mangaluru

Foreword

The last two years may be described as something of a golden age in the history of Tulu literature from the point of its translation to English. It is a record that during the last two years as many as six Tulu works, both in folklore and creative literature, have been translated to English. This rare feat is achieved by Prof. B. Surendra Rao and Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda. The translations include a selection and translation of modern Tulu poems, *Ladle in a Golden Bowl* (2017), a selection and translation of Tulu folk songs like work songs and dance songs, *When Moonlight is very Hot* (2018), a selection and translation of Tulu folktales, *The Rainboy* (2018), English translation of Dr. D.K. Chowta's much-acclaimed Tulu novel, *Mittabail Yamunakka: A Tale of a Landlord's Household* (2018), and English translation S.U. Paniyady's first Tulu novel, *Sati Kamale* (2019). Now Polali Sheenappa Heggade's novel-like longish story, *Mithya Narayana Kathe* is translated into English as *Tale of Narayana the Impostor*. My two scholar-friends have been doing this work of translating various genres of Tulu literature into English with single-minded devotion, as if they are fulfilling a religious vow! Because of their passion and tireless labour, Tulu is able to record its presence in the map of

world literature. A regional language like Tulu, which has a rich tradition of oral literature, can only introduce itself to the larger world through such translations, which, in turn, can be a passport to greater development of that language and literary pursuits.

The author of the present work, Polali Sheenappa Heggade, was a nationalist, a Gandhian and a freedom fighter, who had been duly incarcerated by the British for his nationalistic fervour and activities. He was also a passionate researcher of Tulu history and culture, and *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* which he published in 1935 was a unique work, the structure and content of which are highlighted by the translators, Rao and Gowda, in their long, critical introduction of eighteen pages. Their cryptic description of the work as 'Story with wings... flying into the realm of the fable' is very meaningful, even metaphorically. They show how "*Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* is a rich pulp of historical and cultural description, centred on events, institutions, cults and practices" of Tulunadu. They point out that structurally the work has only a skeleton of a story on which are added thick details of Tulu life and cultural descriptions, which often come in the way of a felicitous presentation of the story: "They add frills to the Tulu dialogues in the narrative and bring in immediacy to the narrative. However, his [the author's] strategy to saddle his story with certain tedious details about temples, cults, local centres of power, festivals, jewellery and all, though rich in details, add little to the story or its easy narration."

I believe that this text of *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* must have presented a greater challenge to Surendra Rao and Chinnappa Gowda than the other two novels, *Mittabail Yamunakka* and *Sati Kamale*, which they have already translated to English. The translators have perhaps faced, for the first time, the problem of not finding a simple narrative structure in the work, even as fables and historical information get freely mixed up there, besides stumbling upon dazzling nuggets of riches that deserve to be gathered and

preserved in Tulu cultural encyclopaedia, besides an opulence of native idioms that pop up freely and playfully which defy easy translation.

The dialogues that appear in the 'Tale of the First Month' in the book are interesting, particularly as snapshots of Tuluva rural life and are redolent of its special culture, besides conveying its unique tone and intonation. Warranting particular mention are the dialogues between Antakke and Poovakke, and between the Lord of the Guttu and the Carpenter and between the Lord of the Guttu and the Brahmin priest. The 'Tale of the Second Month' carries many a mixture of the historical and cultural associations of Tulunadu, including the stories connected with the *Nāgalōka* or the Realm of the Serpents, the origins of matrilineal tradition in the region and the customs related to it, the history of the Choutas of Puttige, details regarding the Brahmin priests and so on. In the 'Tale of the Third Month' figures a mixture of details regarding the Jain ruling families of the region like the Choutas, the rulers of Puttige, details of their palaces, families and life-styles. The 'Tale of the Fourth Month' has some interesting cultural details which can be real teasers to any translation project, such as descriptions the Temple Festival of Polali called '*Polaḷi Chenḍu*', '*Pancha Parva*', details regarding the Brahmin tradition of worship in the region and descriptions of the various festivals celebrated there, on the one hand, and, on the other, it also highlights the cultural plurality that marks the Tuluva universe. The latter is suggested in the dialogue between the Carpenter and the Brahmin, and their dialogue with Beera. The 'Tale of the Fifth Month' is replete with the details of the local history, the history of Moodabidre, the details on the palace of Moodabidre, of the Jain royal families, including those of the Choutas, and the relation between the royal households and the local *Guttu* houses. Besides these political descriptions, the chapter unfolds the agrarian base of the Guttu houses, including those of the vast, sprawling *Bākimār*

fields which advertised the powers of the Guttu houses.

The 'Tale of the Sixth Month' again brings us back to the story the work intends to tell. In it figures a dialogue between the two queens of the Chouta and Sooralu royal households, which touches upon the vexed question of women's education in the context of the invading modernity. The author has crafted the context and conversations as an occasion to expound his Gandhian views. The repudiation of an obsessive love for jewellery and unhealthy hankering for gold among women and the importance of education in their lives get highlighted here. The chapter heralding the 'Seventh Month' is again replete with the varied details of the local culture such as the temple festival, the tradition of the icon of the god/goddess of the temple being taken around the temple or the town in procession, as also the elaborate rituals associated with the temple, the things needed for these rituals and so on are listed as in a sort of encyclopaedic handbook, contextualised, as they are, in the dialogue between Lingappa and Sankraya Achary. The 'Tale of the Eight Month' has interesting details of exorcism as practiced in Tulunadu. In the 'Tale of the Ninth Month' we see the Tulu adages used to great effect, as they are linked to the conversations among the women of the village, which carry their own tone of directness, which can be a challenge to those who intend to translate them into another language, particularly, English. In the subsequent chapters the story gathers its pace, and is told as a kind of a parable to illustrate the moral of the adage, "As you sow, so you reap", that those who cheat will surely get their deserts.

I have highlighted the details of the various chapters in the *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* because I am keen to tell the readers how translating a text such as this poses a challenge different from translating other novels and how difficult the project is. The translators, Surendra Rao and Chinnappa Gowda, have, in their critical Introduction, discussed the structure of *Mithya Nārāyaṇa*

Kathe, and have raised certain questions regarding its claim to be considered a novel. But what I consider as more important and laudable, is their willingness and ability to go beyond the question of its genre, and unpack all that this complex text has to offer and show that they can be, with all its cultural baggage, translated into another language, which calls for both self-confidence and competence. There will always be criticisms and insinuations against translations and the translators. But those who translate need not be apologetic about what they do. Today the world of translation has grown into an autonomous realm and gained in importance. Every translation should be able to add to the precept and praxis of translation as a serious activity.

Prof. B. Surendra Rao and Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda have not translated *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* as just another Tulu novel. They have given us a model as to how a Tulu cultural text can be translated into English, and have offered, as it were, guidelines to the aspirants, as to how best a multi-genre cultural text be translated into another language. These two scholars have been my good friends for a long time now. But setting aside that compelling consideration, I sincerely congratulate them for having successfully fulfilled a difficult Satyanarayana vow of translation and rejoice listening to its happy valediction.

Mangaluru **Prof. B.A. Viveka Rai**
10 March 2019

Preface

Of late, we have been bitten by a translation bug and we have made available some of the better works in Tulu to the English readers. We have translated modern Tulu poems in an anthology, *Ladle in a Golden Bowl* (2017), Tulu folk poems like work songs and dance songs in another anthology, *When Moonlight is Very Hot* (2018), a collection of sixty Tulu folktales as *The Rainboy* (2018), a modern Tulu novel by D.K. Chouta, *Mittabail Yamunakka: A Tale of a Landlord's Household* (2018) and the first Tulu novel, *Sati Kamale*, which is under print. While discussing the nature of *Sati Kamale* we were drawn into a debate as to whether it was really the first novel, because there were scholars who had pitted its claim against another work, *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe*, which had preceded it by a year in printing and publication. We took the position that more than chronology it was the respective character of the works which tilts the description of being a novel in favour of *Sati Kamale* written by S.U. Paniyady. That does not mean that Polali Sheenappa Hegde's *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* is any less of a work. It deserves notice for its own unique character and place in the evolution of Tulu literature at a time when the Tulu Movement was being launched. But merely positing such an argument is not to illustrate it. Hence we thought that we owe it to Polali Seenappa Hegde to have his work translated into English, so that

the English readers can discover its uniqueness and limitations. Hence this translation: *Tale of Narayana the Impostor.* We have translated the word *Mithya* as 'Impostor' because in the context of the story that is what Narayana is. *Mithya* can be variously translated as 'illusion', 'false', 'fake', 'phoney', 'cheat' or as 'fraud', depending on the context in which it figures. In the story the Brahmin, Narayana Bhatta, is a fraud, posing himself as God Narayana himself to seduce a credulous princess. He was impersonating God Narayana, and he was an impostor, and a successful one!

It was Professor B.A. Viveka Rai who suggested to us that we lay our hands on this famous impostor. This, he was sure, would place in perspective the evolution of Tulu literature in the 30's of the twentieth century and help us juxtapose the rival claimants to be considered as the first Tulu novel. We thank him for evincing keen interest in our work as also for many critical inputs he offers from time to time, including the honouring the work with a learned Foreword. Hiriyadka Muraleedhara Upadhya has given us valuable material and suggestions while we were engaged in translating this work.

We are indebted to Rajarshi Dr. D. Veerendra Heggade for his constant encouragement to our efforts to communicate the riches of Tulu to those who cannot excavate or enjoy them in the Tulu original.

Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy has come forward to publish this work. Its President, Sri A.C. Bhandari has unstintingly extended the patronage of the Academy and ensured that this work a *Tale of Narayana the Impostor* is published promptly. The Registrar of the Academy, Sri Chandrahasa Rai, has always been generous in his advice and help. We thank them most sincerely.

Kallur Nagesh has printed the book with his well known promptness and elegance. He and his team in Aakrithi Prints are entitled to our appreciation and thanks.

Assaigoli
25th February 2019

B. Surendra Rao
K. Chinnappa Gowda

Introduction

About the Author

Amunanje Guttu Polali Sheenappa Hegde was born on the 8th of August, 1890. After he lost his father at Nandalike at the age of eleven, he moved, as per the custom of his caste, to his mother's house at Amunanje Guttu. He had his early education in the Mission School at Kedinje. He came under the influence of Badakabail Parameshwarayya, who had established his reputation as a scholar in both Kannada and Tulu, and was later part of the Tulu Movement. He instilled into the mind of Sheenappa Hegde a passion for *yakshagāna*, literature, research and writing, particularly in Tulu. He handed over his house at Amunanje Guttu to his sister and moved to Polali where he lived in a small house in the vicinity of the temple. As a young man he was drawn to the Gandhian movement and he had his share of taste of police *lāthis* and he was hosted by the British jails. While he was in the jail, the management of the Polali temple pulled down his house as a traitor to the state. After his return to Polali he lived in a rented house for over three decades, where he pursued his literary interests.

Sheenappa Hegde was in Vellore jail in 1930 and in Cuddalore jail in 1932 for participating in the Civil

Disobedience Movement. He shared his prison life with some of his Tulu nationalist friends like Paniyady and N.S. Kille. He is also said to have had another stint in the British jail in 1942, if we accept the testimony of K.K. Shetty; but we know nothing more about it. When he was not in prison, he was busy with the Gandhian programmes like fighting against the bane of untouchability, burning of foreign clothes, propaganda against manufacture, sale and consumption of liquor, propagating *khādi*, organising national education and so on. These activities distanced him from his wife and children and earned for him censure of the landlord classes, which were generally in favour of the British rule.

His friendship with Paniyady and N.S. Kille, forged within the prison walls of Vellore drew him to the Tulu Movement. By that time he had already won recognition as a historian of Tulunadu. His *Dakshina Kannada Jilleya Charithre Mattu Bhootāla pāndyana Aḷiyakaṭṭu* had been published as early as in 1915 when he was yet twenty-five. There he had used many of the legends and folk traditions in weaving the history of the region, although his familiarity with epigraphical sources or intricacies of historical method was limited. He was all too keen to spread out before his readers the results of his enthusiastic findings. But that is the trap into which an amateur researcher routinely falls. However, his passion for exploration and study helped igniting further researches and in creating an awareness among the Tuluvas regarding their history. B.A. Saletore admitted his debt to Sheenappa Hegde in his own researches on the history of the Tuluvas.

Sheenappa Hegde's association with Paniyady made him an active figure in the Tulu Movement. He was closely associated with "Tuluva Mahasabha" which Paniyady had founded in 1928 and was a party to many of the resolutions it had passed, such as naming South Kanara as 'Tulunadu'. Hegde's three works were published by Paniyady's "Tuluva Sahitya Maale." He also functioned as the

Secretary of "Tuluva Mahasabha" after Paniyady's exit from it. Sheenappa Hegde used to bring out a handwritten monthly magazine "*Tuḷunādu*" and some of the pieces published therein later were published in Honnayya Shetty's *Navayuga.* Two of the Tulu plays published in *Navayuga*, namely, *Prabhāvatina Madime and Vandē Mātaram,* however, are now lost to us. Hegde's love for Tulu and Tulunadu kept burning bright even after the reorganization of states in 1956. He was one of the first to protest against the loss of Kasargod, but was persuaded against active *satyāgraha* in view of his old age.

Sheenappa Hegde lived a many-sided life. He was an agriculturist; he had worked as a bus agent; he was an amateur tailor who specialised in making the dangling figures of cloth-flags to be hoisted in temples during festivities. He was a keen student of *yakshagāna* and *tāḷa-maddaḷe.* He was a participant in them as also in collecting stories for the making of their themes, particularly in Tulu. He was closely associated with the Polali temple, organised *bhajan* singers there and strongly favoured photographing the Goddess, which custom had forbidden.[1]

With so many irons in the fire, his passion for Tuluva history did not yet flag. In 1945 he brought out *Pracheena Tuḷunādu* with N.S. Kille as co-author. It further reinforces his love for Tulu folklore and legends and inclination to relate them to history. Many of the *pāḍdanas* figure in this work as embellishments of Tulu culture. Although the second work was written thirty years after the first, the pattern or methodology of history did not apparently change. By this time scholars like Ganapathi Rao Aigal, Govinda Pai, B.A. Saletore and others had already contributed to the fund of historical knowledge of the region. Although Hegde seemed to have read

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[1] Balakrishna Shetty Polali, *Polali Sheenappa Hegde: Jeevana-Sadhane,* Govinda Pai Research Centre, M.G.M. College, Udupi, 1996.

them, they do not seem to have influenced his approach to history. Sheenappa Hegde continued his interest in history even in his old age. He wrote another work, *Hegaḍera Tuḷunādu* with an Introduction by B.A. Saletore. Even an advertisement of its promised publication appeared in *Navayuga* in1959, indicating the menu on offer. It was purported to cover the period from the pre-Christian era to 1800, and deal with, in various chapters, the flourishing rituals and customs in Tulunadu, its mosaic of faiths and cults, a review of the *puranās* dealing with Tulunadu, the role of the various *Mutts*, besides the culture and folklore of the District. There was also a warning that only a few copies of the book would be published owing to the 'exorbitant cost of paper.' But the book was not published. We have no way of knowing if his perceptions of history had changed because the manuscript of the work is sadly lost. Someone who was over-keen on reading it was not as keen on returning it to the author!

Sheenappa Hegde showed his devotion to the Polali Rajarajeshwari temple by collecting and collating its *sthaḷapurāna* and publishing it as *Pulinapura Mahatme.* "Here research and organization are secondary; what is important for him is to heap together whatever can be known on the subject."[2] His passion for the legends and folklore of Tulunadu is also reflected in his two other works: *Akkarasu Poonjedi Sandhi* is a prose-construction of the Siri *pāḍdana* in Kannada. It retains the flavour of Tulu and misses nothing of the ambience and diction of the *pāḍdana.* His other work of the same class is the Kannada rendering of the Bali legend in Tulunadu, *Tuḷuvāla Baliyēndra.* He also wrote *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe,* which is a novel-like work in Tulu, bringing together the old legends of the region as well as its interface with the intruding

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[2] Aerya Lakshminarayana Alva, 'Preface' to *Sheenappa Hegde Samagra Sahithya* (1991), p.iv

changes, mirroring many facets of the Tulu society. His other works are *Bangārdangida Kathe* and *Ajjerana Mandala Madipu*. Sheenappa Hegde also dabbled in creating a new script called 'Srinivasa Lipi.' It did not take off, though; but it showed his inquisitive, exploratory mind. Hegde indeed represented the larger mood of Tulu Movement in linking it to the history and culture of the land, looking for its uniqueness, antiquity, folk-base, and their role in crafting the genius of Tulu. His cultivation of both Tulu and Kannada was in conformity of the prevalent attitude of acceptance of a hyphenated identity for the region in which the affection for the one was not seen as inimical to the other.

The last days of Sheenappa Hegde were unhappy. His family life did not ensure him peace. His preoccupations with the cause of Tulu, research, national cause and a host of interests did not make his life easy. In the evening of his life he felt he was not even assured of sustenance from his landed property. He moved out of Polali and took up residence in a rented house in Mangalore. Like many of his ilk, he was disenchanted with the party he was part of for so long and joined the Swatantra Party launched by Rajaji. He did not even get the ten acres of land which the government was offering to the surviving freedom fighters. Nor did his wife get the freedom fighter's pension which she was theoretically entitled to. Hegde breathed his last on September 3, 1966.

But Tulunadu remembered the man and his services. In 1990 his birth centenary was celebrated and his complete works were published. A commemorative volume *Tuḷuvāla* ('The Tulu Man') was brought out too. An award was instituted in his honour.

About the Book

Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe came out as part of the first spurt of enthusiasm for Tulu in the 20's and 30's of the twentieth century and was first published in 1935 in 'Tuluva Sahitya Maale' and printed at

'Tulunadu Press' which S.U. Paniyady had launched in Udupi. In fact, eleven works were published in the series. They were: 1) *Tulu Kitnarāji Parsango* by Badakabail Parameshwarayya (1929); 2) *Tuḷuvāla Baliyēndra* by Polali Sheenappa Hegde (1929); 3) *Aḷiyasantāna Kaṭṭuda Guṭṭu* by Satyamitra Bangera (1929); *Kānige* by K.B. Narayana Shetty Kille (1932); 5) *Tuḷu Vyākaraṇa* by S.U. Paniyady (1932); 6) *Jana Marl* by Madhava Thingalaya (1933); 7) *Madmālattu Madmāye* by M. Vittala Hegde (1933); 8) *Bangārdangida Kathe* by Polali Sheenappa Hegde (1933); 9) *Tuḷu Padya Mālike* by Gangadhara Ramachandra (1933); 10) *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* by Polali Sheenappa Hegde (1935); and, 11) *Sati Kamale* by S.U. Paniyady (1936). There was a list of another twelve books to be published under 'Tuluva Sahitya Maale'; but sadly that promise was not redeemed.

Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe, though published in 1935, was written in 1931. It had two other later editions, one in 1989, when the author's birth centenary was celebrated (Shrinivasa Prakashana, Kudupu) and again in 2009 when the 'Vishwa Tulu Sammelana' was held at Ujire. When the work was first published the author in his invocatory portion referred to it as a "small story", and Badakabail Parameshwarayya, in his 'Foreword' lauds it as a "new story". Even the chapters of the story is referred to as 'the story of the first month', 'story of the second month' and so on till it concludes in the 'story of the twelfth month'. However, by the time its second edition came out, it was heralded as the 'first novel in Tulu'. Balakrishna Shetty Polali, a grandson of Polali Sheenappa Hegde, in his monographs in Tulu and Kannada also made such a claim.[3]

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[3] Balakrishna Shetty Polali, as the editor of the Complete Works of Polali Sheenappa Hegde, however, writes that *Mithya Naryana Kathe* is a "longish short-story", though elsewhere it is called a novel. *Sheenappa Hegde Samagra Sahitya,* Polali Sheenappa Hegde Centenary Celebration Committee,(1991), p. vii.

Apart from the chronological precedence over *Sati Kamale*, printed a year later, the claim of *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* to be recognised as the first novel in Tulu is not without problem. We have, in the 'Introduction' to our English translation of *Sati Kamale,* argued that more than the chronological status it is the structure and character of the work which merits the work of S.U. Paniyady the recognition as the first Tulu novel.[4] Aerya Lakshminarayana Alva in his 'Foreword' to the 'Complete Works of Sheenappa Hegde' oscillates between its description as "a novel in a limited sense" and "novel in full sense".[5] But *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* is no less important for that reason. It is a new kind of story, not a small one, but a longish one, more in terms of its size than in content. Its story itself is short, with a curious mixture of what was plausible and what is improbable, of the crafty, scheming, gullible humans getting entangled with the problems of faith and the plans of Narayana the Impostor becoming a problem for even God Narayana to solve. The story sounds so much like a parody, but it is clearly borrowed from *Panchatantra.*[6] The famous original source, which is nowhere acknowledged, tells about the infatuation of a weaver for a princess and how his friend, a carpenter[7], crafts a mechanical bird, for the infatuated weaver to fly into the room of the princess to make it the lovers' rendezvous. This and its aftermath are borrowed by the author to fit the story to a situation in Tulunadu, adding local frills and embroidery. The only

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[4] B. Surendra Rao and K. Chinnappa Gowda, *Sati Kamale*, Manipal Universal Press, (Forthcoming).

[5] Aerya Laksminarayana Alva, *Sheenappa Hegde Samagra Sahitya,* op.cit., p.iv

[6] This is no big sin, since *Panchatantra*'s influence can be seen in such famous works as *The Arabian Nights, Canterbury Tales* and the *Fables of La Fontaine.*

[7] Arthur W. Ryder calls him a 'carpenter'. (1925, Jaico, India, 1994,) p.71. Chandra Rajan calls him 'a chariot-maker'. *The Panchatantra,* (Penguin Books, 1993), p.76

suggestion that the story reached the author from another source is that it was told to him by his friend, Narayana Shetty Kille, when they were in the Vellore Jail, following their arrest for participating in the Freedom Movement. It is possible that the story told by his friend Narayana was made into *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe*, as Balakrishna Shetty Polali has suggested.[8] But its real source was kept under wraps. If it is a parody, the twist in the title of the work could be of "Sathya Narayana Kathe", a popular, collective form of worshipping God Narayana, by recounting the tale of the efficacy of devotion in winning God's benediction.. 'Sathya' was rendered 'Mithya' and 'God Narayana' was impersonated by a trickster carrying that name. The *Panchatantra* story does not carry this parody, though.

To this core story, however, Sheenappa Hegde fervently added rich details of Tuluva history and culture. He was one of the first to explore the history and culture of Tulunadu, both in its political and socio-cultural dimensions. Though his familiarity with the inscriptional sources was not strong, he was one of the earliest enthusiasts to recognise that Tulu folklore, local legends and religious cults and practices were legitimate reservoirs of historical knowledge. In fact, his passion for the Tulu history was part of the revival of 'Tulu-ness' as part of the larger nationalist impulse. Sheenappa Hegde as a spokesman of Tulu culture and identity worked in close association and collaboration with his nationalist friends like Paniyady, Kille, Satyamitra Bangera and others. His other works on Tulu history and culture vouch for his passion and industry, and his *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* can be better situated in his passion for Tulu culture and history rather than within the framework of a novel. *Sati Kamale*, on the other hand, was written as a novel. Its structure,

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[8] Balakrishna Shetty Polali, *Polali Sheenappa Hegde: A Monograph* (1996), R. G. Pai Research Centre, M.G.M. Udupi, p.46

flow and its hopes to engage with the changing times, make it the first attempt of a Tuluva author to write a novel. The author of *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* did not aspire to move in that direction. He has told, or rather re-told a story, and he contextualised it in Tulu history, or rather, what he reckoned as Tulu history. That makes the *Tale of Narayana the Impostor* a unique story. We need not say that it *falls short of a novel;* it was not written as a novel, to start with. Hence it is unfair to call it a novel and judge it as a novel. On the other hand, it can claim to be a 'Tale' which allows a free interplay between the real and the fabulous, the possible and the implausible. When the author chooses the framework of history as he understands it, he chooses to anchor himself notionally in time and more authentically in space. He negotiates with his own space with mighty confidence. The Polali temple, its management and jurisdiction, its fame and festivities are all explained in tireless details. The society and polity which support it are brought out with no less enthusiasm. Besides, there are long lists of artefacts, cults and practices of Tulunadu, so much so, B.A. Viveka Rai aptly likens it to a veritable 'cultural glossary of the region'. There are elaborate descriptions of fairs and temple festivities to show aspects of Tulu life, which loosely contextualise the actions of the characters that figure in the novel. Such details are artificially drawn from out of the conversations artificially ordered. Many of the dialogues are not germane to the story but are meant to bring out the list of information which the author has in his custody and keen to communicate with the readers. So much so, one can easily separate the terrain of the story from the terrain of the information which the author wants to convey, as an enthusiast of Tuluva history and culture. The story is merely tethered to the latter. That is why, if one looks for a novel in *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe*, one gets less of a novel and more of a little core of a story, surrounded with a rich pulp of history and legends, both regional and local.

A novel ought to have certain features and deciding characteristics. It is more than a story. It has a story, no doubt; but it has many complex plots and development of plots. A story can be told within a small framework of events to entertain, excite, titillate, to conform to a value or as a defiance of it or as unfolding of various moods of life like hopes, frustrations, success, pathos and so on. It can be a parable to convey a moral. Its characters need not necessarily be human: gods, demons, animals can figure in them in happy abandon. But in a novel the story unfolds through the development and interplay of characters within certain social and situational contexts, where values and temperaments clash or negotiated. In fact, it is the characters which make the novel more than the story. The reality-effect of a novel is created not so much by its historicity as by the resonance that the characters and situations of the novel can establish with the readers. It establishes a sense of contemporaneity of the novel. As Walter Allen points out, "Like any other artist the novelist is a maker. He is making an imitation, an imitation of man on earth. He is making...a working model of life as he sees and feels it, his conclusions about it being expressed in the characters he invents, the situations in which he places them, and in the very words he chooses for those purposes."[9]

Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe has none of the burdens of a novel. It is a story with wings, as it were, flying into the realm of the fable. In its original unacknowledged source, *Panchatantra,* its message is that a weaver with his unusual daring and valour is eligible to get acknowledged as *kshatriya* or a warrior and hence becomes eligible to take the hands of a princess. Here in the *Tale of Narayana the Impostor*, the impostor is punished by God Narayana for his impunity; but neither the King nor the princess who the impostor

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[9] Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History,* Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1954, reprint, 1970, p.14

had tricked ever realised that they had become the victims of a grand act of cheating! For all the power of the King and accomplishments of Siridevi, over which the author waxes eloquent, they end up show-casing their easy gullibility. The King is so thankful to the impostor that he retains him in the palace, not so much because he could no longer fly away in his broken contraption of fly-eagle, but because he was convinced that the limping Brahmin was truly an incarnation of God Narayana who had rescued him and his kingdom! He even becomes a counsellor of the King and turns out to be something of a 'constitution maker!'

The story of Narayana the Impostor has no development of any characters in them. They are simply designed to do a particular job. In between stages when the story moves ahead to its dénouement, there are definite pauses to accommodate information about events and institutions, whether it is of the temple at Polali or the newly constructed temple at Puttige. The details provided are useful. The author seems over-keen to provide them for sure; but they are not in any way important to the story, either in its basic framework or for its development. If one can take out the details of information which the author provides on temples, their jurisdiction, functionaries, the festivals and all the enthusiasm which people show for them, the endless list of cults, centres of serpent worship, and citadels of local power and so on, we can yet conveniently tell the story of the Impostor and those who he fooled with such consummate skill. In fact, we see two sides of the author. One is the story-teller and another is the spokesman of Tulu history and culture. The two sides do not merge, but stay in two distinctly recognizable layers.

Denying the status of *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* as a novel is not to belittle the importance of the work. It is a longish short-story (*neeḷgathe*), which happily orchestrates the real with the unreal, the world of humans with the world of gods. The author has, for a change, added a hefty dose of what he thought was the history and culture

of Tulunadu. Such stories have figured in Kannada and other Indian languages before the modern genre of novel evolved. Purushottama Bilimale refers to such works as *Kalāvathi Pariṇaya* by Yadava (1815), *Saugandhikā Pariṇaya* by Mummadi Krishnaraja (1821) and *Śringāra Chaturyōllasini* by Gubbi Murigaradhya (1896). They revel in romantic, imaginative re-creation of the world and the influence of Guṇādya's *Brihatkathā* on them is too obvious to miss.[10] A.R. Krishna Shastri points out that an imagined construction in them becomes more important than the reality on which the imagination is rooted or crafted.[11] Shivarama Padikkal has discussed a whole genre of literature which seemed to preface the advent of novels in Kannada, which includes the works mentioned above and points out that some of Gaḷaganātha's works which invoke history are less about history than his imaginings about it.[12] *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* hovers in the pre-novel literary imaginings to proclaim certain values which the author thinks are losing their ground in the changing world.

The story around which the work is crafted is a story of a romance, but the author looks at it as an instance of skulduggery, of a brave act of cheating and lies and equally pathetic instance of credulity. Whether it is a case of an individual tricking another individual is not quite clear to the author, because he has a lot to say about decadence and depravity overtaking the world in the iron age of *Kali Yuga,* where untruth, deceit and skulduggery alone triumph. There are passages in which the author pauses to unleash his homily

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[10] Purushottama Bilimale, *Shishta-Parishishta,* Madipu Prakashana, Mangala Gangotri, (1992), p.31

[11] A.R. Krishna Shastri, *Kathamritha,* Vishwa Kannada Sammelana, Bengaluru,(1983), p.xiv

[12] Shivarama Padikkal, *Naadu Nudiya Rūpaka: Rashtra, Ādhunikathe mattu Kannadada Modala Kadambarigalu,* Prasaranga, Mangalore University, Mangala Gangotri (2001), pp.55-62

or the impostor Narayana himself indulges in eloquent soliloquy to say that in the decadent world it is not so much the truth as the daring untruth which succeeds and makes life easy. The anguish of the author over such a decadent state of affairs is clear, but the story itself does not emphatically say that Bhatta's spectacular untruth is finally punished. For, even the true God Narayana could not show Bhatta as an impostor. The punishment meted out to him is only a little pain in his leg for having been a pain in His arse! The true God Narayana was more worried about his own reputation than about showing the impostor for what he was. At the end of it all, the King, and Bhatta's gullible princess and the whole palace are confirmed in their belief that the person who saved them was the real God. If this merely goes to confirm the author's diagnosis of the Kali Age as a decadent age, it is a fair dénouement! If, on the other hand, we see the whole thing as a satire, the story makes sense as a parody of the decadent age and the people who make it, which even makes God subservient to its foibles.

The decadent of the Kali Age is further indicated in some of the silences in the story. The impostor who aspires to win over the Jain princess is a Brahmin. Though the caste distinctions are conspicuously drawn in the surrounding pulp of the story, they do not figure at all in the relationship between the two. The Brahmin God becomes acceptable so long as He can save the King and the Kingdom. Besides, there is no hint that the man who impregnated Siridevi ever got to marry her. It is assumed that they were married by the *Gandharva* code. That was good enough for the King, the princess and the whole palace. To the impostor that was certainly good enough. The author does not raise this issue at all, as if to suggest that it was good enough for him too! This silence is significantly different from what the *Panchatantra* story tells us that the weaver who cheated the princess was finally declared as a worthy warrior after his success and was married to the princess. Here in *Mithya*

Nārāyaṇa Kathe the question of marriage was not raised at all. *Fait accompli* was seen as good enough!

The author was a nationalist and an activist. He was acutely conscious of the changes taking place in politics and society and he was apparently aware of the reformist mood in the country. But his attitude to these changes was that of a conservative, as a champion of the *status quo*.[13] Interestingly, he does not say much about the changes, except to say that the new kings in India are drained of their power and prestige and have only been dancing to the tune of 'the white-faced rulers of the country'. The old tradition of royalty, however, was grand, all-powerful and all-benevolent and could do no wrong. This is typical of the romantic imaginings about our ancient royalty who glitter and dazzle in our imagination and history books, while the nationalistic mood was to declare them as anachronistic and as irrelevant oddities. But the author is quick to assure us that when this story took place the royalty was yet grand and powerful, and he spares no pain to show that it was really so. Here the author comes out as an enthusiastic historian, who takes upon himself the duty to show that ancient kings were truly great.

However, Polali Sheenappa Hegde's nationalistic impulse gets reflected in the way he strongly championed the cause of Tulu, both as a language and as a purveyor of Tulu culture. In fact, the Tulu Movement of the 20's and the 30's of the twentieth century should be seen as part of the larger nationalist mood which he shared with people like Paniyady, Kille and others. He revelled in writing in Tulu, and his Tulu prose was powerful and incisive. He always wanted to show that Tulu should be projected as a medium of Tulu cultural lore, which was rich but needed serious exploration. He was, as his other friends in the Tulu Movement were, acutely conscious of the

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[13] Purushottama Bilimale, *Shishta-Parishishta*, Madipu Prakashana, Mangala Gangotri, (1992), p.31

fact that unless Tulu culture was assiduously cultivated and passionately projected, both the language and the culture it was associated with would be swept away by the intruding wave of modernity. In fact, *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* has a rich pulp of historical and cultural description centred on events, institutions, cults and practices. There is a fine demonstration of opulence of Tulu vocabulary, idioms and usages. The narrative is interspersed with several Tulu adages, and a scholar has counted as many as forty-three of them. They add frills to the Tulu dialogues in the narrative and bring in immediacy to the narrative. However, his strategy to saddle his story with certain tedious details about temples, cults, local centres of power, festivals, jewellery and all, though rich in themselves, add little to the story or to its easy narration.

"*Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* is a welter of history, legends, social mores, linguistic riches and eccentricities, changing attitudes of people and a host of forces that peep in and out of the Tulu world, abolishing the boundaries between the imagined and the real. That it was written in Tulu gave it significance far beyond the contents or merits of the work."[14]

We have chosen to translate this unique work in Tulu to English to show what trajectory modern Tulu literature had taken in the early years of its resurgence. We have used the second edition of the book, published in 1989, and occasionally comparing it with the edition brought out on the occasion of the World Tulu Conference held at Ujire in 2009. While translating the Tulu text we had to untangle it a great deal, because it was originally written without any serious thought to making suitable paragraphs or distribution of proper dialogue structures. In it there are no definite clusters of ideas,

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[14] B. Surendra Rao, *Bunts in History and Culture,* Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Research Centre, Udupi and World Bunts' Foundation Trust, Mangalore(2010), p.287

but everything is crammed together as in a Mumbai suburban train. Often the sentences in the Tulu original are long, tedious and convoluted, unrelieved by commas and semi-colons. As translators we had to order such sentences into some discipline. The lack of it in the original can only be explained as the triumph of enthusiasm over order, not altogether unexpected in the efforts of a pioneer in Tulu prose. However, we had to desist from retaining the rich cultural glossary that the book carries because that would have entailed appending a long explanatory list. We have merely dared a translation of what could be translated. We have done so with a view to reach the English readers as far as possible, because by translating a Tulu work we produce an English book. This has been our translation policy all through, in all the ventures we have undertaken to translate Tulu poems, folktales, folk poems and Tulu novels. This is not to say that the Tulu contexts and meanings are deliberately bent to hew a path in English. They are merely sought to be conveyed in English, with all the limitations inherent in the exercise of translation and in the translators. We are particularly reminded of those limitations when we translate the words and matter carrying a thick cultural load. Normal conversations pose no such challenge. We have tried to navigate our journey through whirls and shoal to the best our abilities.

B. Surendra Rao
K. Chinnappa Gowda

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1.

Tale of the First Month

As the darkness of the night receded, the gathering of cocks and hens sent up their loud, fitful crows in the morning, "*Kokko...Ko...ko...*" - reaching every four directions of the village,- as if to say "Get up Sir! Get up Sir!" to awaken the yet dozing boss of the household. That sound woke up the lord of the Guttu house. At that time little birds chirped their language and tried to wake the little children up. Seeing this, the crows put together their own orchestra of "*Ka...Aka...Ka... Aka...*" as a wake-up call to the women of the household.

The boss of the household got up, opened the little cloth bag in which betel leaves and areca nuts were kept and leisurely started chewing some of its content. Then when he called out the bonded labourers loudly and authoritatively to direct them to their work, other men folk of the house too were alerted and hastened to their work. Since the boss was up already, the tenants woke up too and rolled up their mats. When the tenant women tried to light the hearth, the fire went out, and they went to the neighbourhood to fetch fire again to light the hearth and cook rice-gruel. The women of the house, who were in charge of the kitchen lit the hearth, placed the pot on fire to cook rice- gruel and went out

to the platform of the well to wash the previous day's pots and utensils. Young girls of the household too got up, combed and tied their hair together, and set about sweeping the floor with broomsticks. As they were doing it, small children, yet half-awake, were rolling from one mat to another. The young girls woke them up, rolled up their mats and swept the floor. Some of the children hastened to the shed where rice-washed water was being boiled for the cattle and sat by the fire to fight off the morning chill, while some went to the field to catch butterflies and grasshoppers and some others hurried to the rivulets. Some small girls ran to pick and collect flowers. Some older girls stayed to look after smaller children.

By this time the sounds of drums and bells were heard from the temple. The boys among children now readied themselves by washing their feet clean, cleaning their teeth bright and set about reciting the lessons they had learnt from the Brahmin tutor. The girls too washed their faces, wrote the auspicious designs on the threshold of the house, placed a lamp and sprinkled flowers on it before paying obeisance to the Goddess of Fortune. They then combed their hair, placed the vermilion mark on their foreheads and adorned their eyes with mascara.

By then the workers had eaten their rice-gruel or the previous day's rice soaked in water and had gone to their places of work. The bonded labourers fed the cattle with the rice-washed water and bran of rice cooked well into a lump. Then carrying their ploughs and yokes on their shoulders, they drove the cattle to the fields for ploughing. Some workers got down to uprooting the seedlings in one field; some were carrying green manure; some others were engaged in setting right the walking path across the field as also with levelling the field. The lord of the household, wrapping himself with a shawl, was checking the level of water in the field. "See that the ploughing cattle reach the far corner! Don't turn around half way! Make a fine furrow. Don't leave too much space between the two!" Thus the lord of the household shouted instructions to the ploughmen,

and sat down by the side of the field to chew betel leaves and nuts.

They were ploughing every field, the higher one or the lower. But the Guttu fields were being ploughed with a pair of big oxen trained to draw carts. Following them was a pair of racing buffaloes. Behind them were about sixteen pairs of buffaloes which did the ploughing. One round of ploughing would complete one full division of the field. In another corner, the uprooted seedlings were collected in shallow baskets and spread on the ploughed field for replanting. To prod the buffaloes to speed up their gait and movement, the ploughmen would gently beat them with the sticks. Only keen and sensitive listeners would appreciate the beauty of the accompanying songs of ploughmen! As the seedlings were being replanted, forty to fifty women were singing the lilting work-songs, "O Bele... O Bele..." Those who were listening to these songs stood where they did and were lost in their lilt and charm. It is hard to describe their beauty. One should only listen to them.

Women in the kitchen swept the floor and sprinkled on it the cleansing water mixed with cow dung. Then they went to the cowshed. They offered water and rice-washed water to the cattle and fed them with oilcakes. They patted and caressed their bodies with affection and applied oil on their bodies. They washed their feet and placed vermilion marks on their foreheads and bowed before them. They washed their udder and released the calves to have their rightful share of milk. Then they milked the cows and brought the milk to place it reverentially on the threshold of the house, and bowed again. By then the children were ready to go to the 'Brahmin School' with their palm leaves and iron styli for writing.

Another woman washed the copper and brass plates and utensils with ash. She then churned the buttermilk to prise out butter and fed the children who had set out for school. Other women busied themselves with the work assigned to them. One of them collected pennywort; another gathered creeper spinach; yet another collected

tender amaranth while another collected vegetables like okra, long beans, aubergine and ridge gourd from the back yard. Thereafter, they all went to the platform of the well to clean their teeth and wash their faces. They then sat on the platform of the well and launched into their conversations.

Poovakke: "By the way, Antakke! Today is Saturday, isn't it? Our elder brother observes a ritual vow regarding eating on Saturdays, doesn't he? What curry should we prepare today?"

Antakke: "It is not just for the elder brother. Many others also observe it, don't they? Brothers like Konja, Koonta, Gompa, Koita and others like Bheemappa, Bonkappa and Lingu."

Poovakke: "Leave it aside. What we prepare for our elder brother is good enough for them too. There are two other guests too, aren't they?"

Ramakke: "Tell me, the lady of Parady! Where are the guests from?"

Poovakke: "You know the namesake of the brother-in-law of the Pade House. The guest is his daughter's husband."

Ramakke: "Whose husband? Is he the husband of Bormale?"

Poovakke: "No; I say! He is the husband of Bimakka-Bonyakke!"

Ramakke: "Is he the husband of the youngest daughter, Kunhakke?"

Poovakke: "Damn it! Tell me what vegetables do we have with which to make curry today?

Abbakke: "What do you need? We will make a curry of cucumber mixed with moong bean and seeds of jack fruit. We will also make a dry curry of the cucumber peel, long beans, okra and ridge gourd. We may also make a thick curry of the leafy vegetable with aubergine added to it. Besides, we can make a spicy paste of pennywort. What else do we need?"

Manjakke: "We have bitter gourd and the wild ridge gourd, don't we?"

Poovakke: "Isn't there an adage, '*Kanchala ittunda enchala uṇōli*'?[1] The other wild ridge gourd and another wild vegetable we have, we may reserve for the evening. For now we have *pappad,* fried savouries, pickles and curd, and all. Aren't they enough?"

Tungu: "That is fine! Enkama! What do we prepare for the surrogate meal at night?"

Enkama: "Why are you worried about it? We may make a pudding out of the raw rice flour, brown sugar and coconut gratings. May we?"

Tungu: "She is always enamoured of that damned pudding! As they say '*Nuḍiyere teriyandinālegu ninni, adiyare teriyandinālegu maṇṇi*'[2] Why pudding?"

Enkama: "All right! Cook whatever you choose fit! Why should we the poor bother about you people?"

Kunhakke: "I don't like her grumblings! If we ask why we should cook pudding when guests are around, she flies off the handle! All right! We will make thin rice dosa and sweetened coconut milk to go with it. It is long since we have made dosa."

Poovakke: "You get angry when I suggest something. If we make thin rice dosa, children will pounce on them and devour them in a trice! Let's us avoid that hassle. Let's make steam-cooked rice cakes in earthen wares. Shall we?"

Parmesri: "But we have no urad dal left at home to make steam-cooked rice cakes! We may make rice noodles instead!"

Abbakke: "Making rice noodles can be an irritating job. It's better that we make rice balls!"

Kunhakke: "Look at her weird suggestion! Do we make rice balls when guests are around? Let's make rice noodles only. Besides,

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[1] "With bitter gourd around we can assuredly eat well!" The idea is, though it is bitter, when it is cooked it tastes well and has huge health benefits.

[2] "It is like echo for the one who knows not how to play the musical instrument, even as pudding is to the one who knows not how to cook!"

we have those special plantains which Koti had brought us. With them we can make sweet liquid pudding to go with the noodles."

Antakke: "By the way, Bailu Aunty! Elyanna's cow, Subbi, is reportedly refusing to yield milk for the last few days. It seems she doesn't even allow her calf to touch or suck her udder. Why is that so?"

Poovakke: "That is because our deity Bobbarya has not been propitiated enough. He is not offered his due since the *Sōṇa* month! Better we do it the next Sunday."

Parmesri: "On Sunday our uncle will not be available. He seems to have a plan to go to town. We can have it on Tuesday, instead."

Abbakke: "If our elder brother goes to the market, I should ask him to get me a thick saree to wear."

Poovakke: "Why a thick saree? Better get a thin, smaller *saree* for you to change at night."

Kunhakke: "Why? When the elder brother goes to the market in the town, it is not thick or thin saree that you ask him to bring! Remember to ask him to bring salt, chillies, spices and provisions which are running short at home. He will be irritated if you mention about specific things going short every now and then."

Enkama: "Yes, you are right! We have run out of brown sugar too. We should remember to remind him."

By this time Bailu Aunty was called out by her children. Young men washed their faces, poured water into the holy basil platform, smeared holy ash on their foreheads and went in to settle down to eat rice-gruel. Then the urchins who were assigned the job of tending cattle released the cattle in the shed to graze in the hillside. They also carried a basket each to collect cow-dung and drove the cattle, crooning a song. Young girls too washed their faces, combed and tidied their hair, applied dark eyeshades, adorned their hair with flowers and placed a dot of vermilion on their foreheads. Watching and admiring their reflections in the mirror, they untied their hair to freedom, went out to pour water to the holy basil plant, paid obeisance

to *Nāga Berma* and applied sandal paste on their forehead. Then after partaking of their share of rice gruel, they sat down to play the board game of *chenne*.

The women in the kitchen arranged for the working men folk their morning rice-gruel in a big vessel to be served along with dry curry of raw jack fruit, and pickles made of mango, wild jack fruit, yam and a mixture of tamarind, salt and chillies. They set apart some quantity of rice-gruel while the rest they drained its water off to get ready the cooked rice. Young men ate their share of gruel and went to the site of their work.

At that time the Brahmin priest who was assigned to visit the house every Saturday, came into the front hall after pouring libation on the *Nāga* icon, worshipping the peepul tree, and carrying with him sacred ritual gifts. The lord of the household had, by that time, already smeared his body with rejuvenating oil, and had sat down in the main hall, chewing betel leaves and nuts. He paid his obeisance to the priest and said: "By the way, revered priest! When is the new moon day? Which day *Sankrānti* falls on?[3] How many days we have left behind in this month?"

The Brahmin priest opened his almanac and said: "The new moon day falls on the night of Thursday. It extends up to seven and a half *galige*[4] on Friday. *Sankrānti* falls on not the next Monday but the Monday thereafter. This month has left behind twenty-one days already....But Lord of the House, I am stuck into a serious problem. On the next Monday I have to perform the annual rite of remembrance of my father. I have nothing like any vegetable at home. During this time we don't get any vegetable anywhere. You may

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[3] The passage of the sun from one sign of the zodiac to another.

[4] *Ghaḷige* is a unit of time. It is a period of about twenty-four minutes, 1/60th part of the day. But in the common parlance the word implies 'a short duration'. When someone says he will be back in a *ghaḷige*, he means he will be back in a moment.

help me with a gift of an ash gourd."

The head of the Guttu said: "Just that? Let me send you two head-loads of vegetables! Don't you worry! You make other arrangements for the ritual." Saying so, the lord of the house opened the sachet to start another round of masticating betel leaves and nuts.

At that time a person came there carrying a bundle and a box, and saluted both the head of the Guttu house and the Brahmin priest.

Head of the Guttu: "Hey! Who is there? Bring two wooden planks for these two to sit on." Then addressing the new comer, he asked, "Where do you hail from?"

Achary: "I am from the South, my lord! I belong to Mayippady."

Head of the Guttu: "Which caste you belong to?"

Achary: "I am an Achary,[5] my Lord!"

Head of the Guttu: "What Achary are you? A carpenter? A blacksmith? A goldsmith? What work do you do?"

Achary: "My ancestors were carpenters. I too am an adept in fine workmanship in wood. But I have also learnt the work of a goldsmith."

Head of the Guttu: "What are these bundles and boxes?"

Achary: "These are all the equipments connected with my profession, my lord! If I get any assignment of work in rich houses like yours, I thought I would do it and eke out my livelihood. That's why I am here, lord!"

Head of the Guttu: "Why so? Are you not finding any job in your own place? Who else are there in your house?"

Achary: "We are three sons to our parents. My elder brothers

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[5] The word 'Achary' indicates a traditional group of professions like carpenters, blacksmiths and goldsmiths, with an inbuilt hierarchy so ingrained in Indian social life. It has become a not-so-unfamiliar surname too, indicating a loose package of caste status. These days the caste is called 'Vishwakarma' after the legendary craftsman of the gods.

are married already. Listening to the evil counsels of their wives, my bothers have driven me out of the house. That anger and indignation have brought me here, - leaving my house and all that I can call my own. I have come here with the hope that I can serve such rich and famous people as you and earn my living, my lord!"

The Head of the Guttu: "If I provide you with a house, will you stay?"

Achary: "Why not, if the Lord of the House wills it and says so? I certainly will, Sir!"

The Head of the Guttu: "Dear Priest! There is a house, close to yours, which is untenanted, isn't it? Please get it repaired and give it to him...Yes! If you decide to stay, go with this Brahmin priest! He will provide you with a house to stay."

Achary: "It is not enough that you give me a house, my lord! You may have to give me work too, sir!"

The Head of the Guttu: "You may not be short of work here. But be good with everybody. Now go with our Brahmin priest! Right now I am not free to talk to you for long. There are nearly fifty workers busy plucking seedlings. Fields, to the extent of taking five muras of paddy seeds, have to be replanted with seedlings. I will see you after a few days." He then called out "Who is there inside? Kunhakka! Give our Brahmin priest rice and coconut... And give that Achary too his ration of rice to cook." The head of the house bade them to take what was being offered and he got ready to leave.

The Brahmin Priest: "Lord of the Guttu! Do not forget what I had asked for....There is nothing more to say...."

The Head of the Guttu: "Yes! Yes! I remember! I will send the things in the evening" He then called Tyampanna, and said, "Look! In a few days hence there will be a ritual of annual remembrance of the priest's father at his house. Send him two head-loads of vegetables through Thoma. Don't forget!"

Saying this, the head of the Guttu set out to oversee the work in

the fields. He stopped those who were engaged in ploughing and bade them to release the buffaloes. He made the workers wash the buffaloes, oil them before they tied them in the cattle-shed and feed them with cooked horse-gram.

He then returned home and proceeded to the bathroom. He had a gorgeous hot water bath, expending two drum-full of hot-water. Reciting the praise of Lord Narayana he came back to the main hall. He applied holy ashes on his forehead as a mark of devotion; he smeared sandal paste to augment his beauty and red sandal paste to add to his grandeur. He paid obeisance to the deity Naga Berma and other daivas that represent the Truth of the land and poured water to the holy basil plant on the platform. He then accompanied other young men of the house to the dining hall.

A grand Saturday meal was duly completed and they all settled down to chew betel leaves and nuts. The fighting cocks that were being reared duly received their water to drink and paddy to peck at. He himself went to the cattle shed and fed the buffaloes and cows. He assigned petty jobs to workers. He then spread the mat on the cot and snatched a siesta.

The members of the household - men, women and children, assembled inside the house and were busy speculating as to who the newly arrived Achary was. Achary seems to be visibly smart and talented. He is into all kinds of things in *Tāḷa-maddaḷe:* He can sing; he can expatiate on the stanzas; he can play on *Maddale* too. Even the Brahmin priest seems to be hugely impressed with him. He is mostly found in Achary's house, and rarely in his own. The Brahmin priest is never tired of singing the praise of Achary even as Achary is never tired of praising the glory of the Brahmin priest. The two are always together, regaling each other, participating in *Tāḷa-maddaḷe*, needling and teasing those who go to them, and thus they were spending their days merrily.

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2.

Tale of the Second Month

Long, long ago, there was a nether world called *Nāga Lōka.* Here came Turuvasu, who was one of the sons of Yayati Raya of the Lunar Lineage. He had come to the nether world after a quarrel with his father. There he had won over the Lord of Naga Loka and unburdened all his woes to him. He then prostrated before the King of Naga Loka and beseeched him for the honour to be considered as his own progeny. The King of Naga Loka made inquiries about his family and lineage, gave him some wise counsel. He then handed over the responsibility of administering his kingdom to him, built for him a palace named Satyanapura and gave him a Naga Princess in marriage and said,

"Now from henceforth, the children of your marriage with the Naga Princess shall not ever transgress the Naga custom and tradition. If that runs into any opposition or obstacles, I shall protect you!"

Saying this, the King of Naga Loka vanished!

The place where the King of Naga Loka appeared is called Udyavara. (It is also called Udayapura, which can yet be seen today.) The progeny of this remarkable marital union were ruling over the kingdom. They were variously known as *Nāgas, Turuvas, Tuḷuvas, Aḷuvas,*

Satujas, Satyajas, Aḷupas and *Satyaputras.* They variously sported the suffixes and surnames of *'Vāhana', 'Varma', 'Dhwaja'* and *'Pāṇḍya'* and ruled over the region. When these kings were ruling over this Naga Loka, one of them happened go round some of the important places in Tulunadu and reached *Amnoora-Kunji (Lemunja)*. Seeing the divine presence of *Uḷḷālthi* he built a palace and settled down there. From here he used to send to the suzerain at Satyanapura (Udyavara) whatever he needed there. The one who had settled down at *Amnoora-Kunji* came to be called the King of *Purāla-Māda.* (The Polali Palace). They followed the *Nāga Kaṭṭu* or *Aḷvera Kaṭṭu* or the Naga custom of inheritance. They looked upon their deities, land and language as representing or personification of women. Since these were all women, people used to describe the kingdom as under matriarchy. Here women would not go to her husbands' house after marriage. Since their husbands would come, stay and rule in their wives' place, it came to be known as *'Aḷvere Kaṭṭu'*. Be that as it may, for the time being.

Even today the traces of the foundations of the King's place may be seen at Polali and even the spot where his throne stood. That spot is known as the Throne Platform. Even now at the time of the annual Polali *Chenḍu* festivities,[1] on the day of the *Chandra Manḍala* (Minor Car Festival), the Goddess during her ceremonial procession, would go to the Throne Platform and receive worship. This place is at the centre of Tulunadu: From Gurupura, which is about seven and a half miles north of Mangalore, it lies to the east on the river bank, not far enough for a man to carry a head-load at

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[1] Annual temple festival of Polali is famously known as *Chendu.* It involves a kind of football game between two sides of the village. Although today it gets linked to the story of Goddess Durga decapitating the demons, Chanda and Munda and exulting over her victory by playing a macabre football with their decapitated heads, the origin of this practice could have been only with the village game attached to any temple festival.

one stretch.[2] Here every year on the *Sankrānti* day in the month of *Suggi* there would be a month-long temple festival, with the ceremonial hoisting of the dangling *Garuḍa* replica on the flag-post. Here there is a collection of gods and deities like Ullalti, also known as Rajarajeshwari and Durga Parameshwari, Bhadra Mahakali, God Naga Berma known as Subraya, Ganapthi, and *Kshētrapāla* (the Sentinel of the temple complex). The presiding deity of the place, Ullalti, is reputedly very fond of women. Most of the vows and offerings to this temple are from women devotees: Vermilion powder, chain of black-beads, auspicious sarees and flowers, gold and jewellery reach the temple in generous heaps. Here come women afflicted with many woes of health and myriad worries: Those afflictions emanating from the unappeased departed souls, mischievous evil spirits, prowling goblins, harassing ghosts of rootless unmarried Brahmins, *gandharva* who is known to prowl around in the skies in search of women, water-nymphs and serpent-nymphs could show themselves in different symptoms like swooning, shivering, giddiness, wrenching pain in the stomach and acute feeling of nausea, barrenness or frequent miscarriages, imperfect sympathy for the husband, the death of the new-born children, morbid fear or even outright madness. Women suffering from such ailments or symptoms come here and perform a forty-eight day cycle of ritual devotion in a state of utmost cleanliness, dipping themselves everyday in the holy pond and by tying a consecrated amulet around their arms. If they do so, all such afflictions would be cured. Even today hundreds

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[2] In the Tulu the phrase is *Onji Jāvelu tādi.* The word *Jāvelu* or *Jāpelu* means a little stone platform, of the height of a normal person, set up on the road side on which head-loads could be transferred for a while and the person who carried it could rest and recover his breath. Constructing such platforms was considered as acts of religious merit, like setting up counters where people could drink water or butter-milk to quench their thirst.

of women come to the temple, dip themselves in the holy pond and have the amulets tied around their arms. Whoever is possessed by whatever kind of evil spirits, ghosts or goblins, when they come here and stand before the Goddess Bhadra Mahakali, we see them raving and crying "I will go! I will surely go" before they run away! We can see such spectacles even today. These are not made-up stories.

Because of such proven supernatural powers of the Goddess of the place, she is known everywhere, in all the four corners of Tulunadu. This place is now known as Polali, Pulaalu and Puraalu. In the olden days this belonged to Amunja. Around the temple there are about a hundred houses belonging to the Brahmins and temple-serving castes like *Padārthi* and *Moily*. It is said that in the olden days there were more than a thousand houses. It seems after the original temple built by the King crumbled due to neglect and since none came forward to rebuild it, the progeny of the household would not prosper anywhere around that temple. In due course of time the palace of Polali went to rack and ruins. In Tulunadu numerous kings ruled before they exited the scene. And the lineage of the Aluvas vanished out of sight. But when the Jain rulers came to power, this region came to be ruled by the Choutas of Puttige.

Now the honour of deciding on the date of the annual *Chenḍu* festivities in the temple and ritually placing the *Chenḍu* in the field belongs to the royal family of Choutas. Thereafter the priestly *Naṭṭōja* family should be duly informed that the festivities would formally begin on the *Sankrānti* day in the month of *Suggi*. The Nattoja priests would, in turn, ritually seek the permission of the main deity of the temple and inform about the festival to the local eminences. This tradition continues even today, unbroken.

After the annual festival formally concludes with the ritual bringing down of the hoisted *garuḍa* flag in the Polali temple, the annual festival at Puttige temple would be launched on the Sankranti day in

the month of Paggu. There too they have a fortnight long temple festivities and the ritual game of *Chenḍu*. Wherever such festivities are held, and whatever the traditions they invoke, there is nothing to compare with the tradition or festivities at Polali. Many kings had endowed land to this temple. But times have changed. As they say, 'Those days are gone, dear, and even those virtues!' Similarly, the kings of those times have become caricature kings of the chessboard. Today, they have become the abject slaves of the white-faced rulers and dance to their tunes. That is what *Kaliyuga* does to you! But at the time when the events of this story took place, they were yet independent rulers.

Those days the Chouta of Puttige used to be a powerful ruler of our Tulunadu. Under his jurisdiction there were sixteen minor rulers. Those days there were around the Polali temple as many as thirty to forty Brahmin households. Of them four families were of Sthanika Brahmins. Of the other Brahmin families the first was that of the *Tantri,* who was in charge of the ritual installation and consecration of deities; the second was that of the priest who would be performing the daily worship at the temple; the third was that of *Mayya*, who would be taking the idol of the goddess around the temple in daily ritual procession between *Parba* and *Pattanāje;*[3] the fourth one was of *Naṭṭōja*, who was generally in charge of the administration of the temple, provisioning it from time to time. Under him were thirty-six different servants and functionaries who, when summoned, were to perform their traditionally assigned duties in the temple. If they or their families failed to perform their duties, it was within the power of *Naṭṭōja* to replace them with others, considering their caste and qualifications, and duly inform the Chouta ruler. That the

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[3] *Parba* in Tulu is generally the name for any festival, but it particularly refers to Deepavali. *Pattanāje* is the tenth day of the second solar month, which formally concludes all religious and cultural functions of the season in Tulunadu.

administration of the Polali temple was placed in charge of the *Naṭṭōja* and the Bunt family of Amunje Guttu by the Chouta ruler is evidenced by an inscription... Be that as it may!

Of the family of the priests of the temple, there were three brothers, - Rama Bhatta, Keshava Bhatta and Venktramana Bhatta - who lived under one roof, and lived happily. Although they did not have any agriculture lands, they had enough resources otherwise. Any outsider visiting the temple would invariably go to these priests, and they were treated and looked after well. The money spent regularly in their house was much more than what any aristocratic household would spend routinely. If any venerable heads of the *Mutts* were to arrive there, they would not go anywhere else except this family. Of the three brothers Venkatramana Bhatta excelled in Vedic knowledge, performance of rituals and worship and was generally considered educated. Besides, he was a strikingly handsome man. His bodily complexion was golden, like that of a turmeric root. His limbs were sturdy and hard as if made in lathe, and very charming. He was neither too tall nor too short, and sporting a slight convexity in the belly region, he looked very aristocratic and impressive. He had a 'made-for-each-other' wife in Enkamma. In beauty, in manners and virtues, none could match her in the entire Polali. This couple had two sons, Vasudeva and Narayana, and two girls, besides. They were as good children as these parents could get. Whenever people of the place spoke about anybody, they would not but bring in the names of Venkatramana Bhatta, Enkamma and their children. If anybody wanted anything, they were advised to go to Enkamma. But as the saying goes, a good tree is quick to attract parasitic weed. Similarly their elder son Vasudeva Bhatta, as soon as he finished his Vedic education, contracted some mysterious fever and succumbed to it, much like the adage would have it that 'what you get in your hand would not quite reach your mouth'. None could really console this grief-ridden family. Anyone who heard this shocking news felt

as if they had a fall from the tree, and kept stammering what had indeed happened! Unable to put up with the grief, Venkatramana Bhatta too, after a while, developed some illness. No medicine or magic could cure him. His illness aggravated day by day, and he too paid the debt of nature. Now none could really fathom the grief of Enkamma nor write about it. Some of her children were too small and yet un-weaned. They would keep calling for their father!

What would she say when children called out for their father? Such a pain can be felt by only those who experience it and not just by those who read about it. Besides, the family had borrowed money, little by little, when the husband was bed-ridden and also to run the family. However, the younger son, Narayana was very smart and intrepid in every way. He had gained his education quickly; he could recite, as would a parrot, all Vedas, *shāstras, purānas, tantra* and *mantra.* Therefore he could continue his father's profession and manage the family.

This Narayana Bhatta was around twenty-five years of age. In his complexion and bodily mien, he resembled his father. They said he was verily the chip off the old block. He had black curly hairs, resembling a collection of black bees. His face carried a thin, benign moustache. None who met him would leave him without talking to him. He had learnt and imbibed whatever *shāstra* there was. He was verily a wizard in the art of *Tāḷa-maddaḷe,* whether it is singing, or in expatiating on the meaning of the verses, or even in the art of playing on *Maddaḷe.* Anybody who saw him walking along the street would not but stand and stare. Besides, he had a gift of the gab: he could win over anybody. He could speak to anybody in ways they liked; he would please anybody he talked with, and he would easily make them dance to his tune. None could achieve such success as he did. Since he knew everybody in the village, he could be pleasant with everybody, and this art he had learnt right from his childhood. He used to visit frequently the big Guttu or *Bārike* houses of the

area; he would craft the cure or solutions to their problems. He used to perform the worship of the peepul tree, the ritual oblation to the Naga deities and propitiate the daivas. It is with this Narayana Bhatta that the lord of the Guttu House had sent the versatile Achary from Mayippady who had come seeking asylum. Narayana Bhatta took the Achary with him, fed him, refurbished a vacant house to settle him there, and ensured that he was given all the necessary employment. They got on famously together and enjoyed a boisterous companionship!

Let them! What is that to us?

* * *

3

Tale of the Third Month

Those days the administration of Tulunadu was in the hands of Jains and Chennaraya, a Chouta ruler, was ruling over the region. He built a palace called Kayaramanja at Puttige. He got dug a base seven and a half feet and raised a granite wall seventeen and a half feet high on it around the palace. As an outside ring of protection he got dug a massive ditch thirty seven and a half feet wide and seventeen and a half feet deep. He ensured that the ditch had water at least twelve and a half feet deep, summer or rainy season. The soil removed from the ditch was spread around in heap like a sloping wall and planted on it thorny plants like screw pine, wild screw pines and so on, which, in turn, looked verily like a fortress.

To the north of the palace complex was the royal highway, on either side of it was a massive pond. Each pond was carefully lined with granite stones and the pond was full of water plants and creepers, besides lotus flowers, white and red. The royal highway in between these ponds would lead to a massive Elephant Gate, seven and a half feet wide and ten and a half feet high. On the east of the palace was a gate to let in horses. The Elephant Gate was always guarded by four

sturdy, fierce soldiers, carrying sharp, steel swords, spears and javelins. Inside the Elephant Gate was a large sprawling court yard which led one to the inner yard of the royal household. On either side of it, and facing each other, was a hall of private audience and another where meetings were held. The hall of royal audience had in it a platform on which was placed the golden royal throne. On either side of the throne were perennially lit golden lamps. By its side was a swinging silver cradle and placed in front of it were two hanging golden lamps. And there were three storeys over the royal front hall.

In front of the royal front hall was a platform three feet high and with its length and breadth fifty feet each. It was meant for wrestlers, body-builders, gymnasts and others to perform and show their skills. The queens and their retinue would watch these performances from the seraglio located upstairs. One of the halls on the ground floor was meant for a team of accountants. In another hall the heads of the Guttus and Barikes would settle the litigations brought before them.

On the eastern side of the palace there were as many as three halls facing each other. In front of them were two ponds, and flower gardens around them. They were surrounded with high walls with a gate, always guarded by two women sentinels. The location of the outlet of these ponds ensured that they did not have more than five feet of water at any time. These ponds were meant for the queens to bathe in.

On the western side too there were three such halls. In front of them was a large flower garden, at the centre of which was a big, enchanting pond. In it they had reared every kind of fish that could be reared. Around that pond they had put up stone benches on which people could sit and watch. The pond had a perennial supply of water of the depth equal to the height of three persons put together. This was meant for the men of the royal household for taking bath.

On one side of the pond was a gymnasium. On another side was a hall which functioned as school where the teacher taught his pupils reading and writing. Another side of the area had stone pillars to tie the elephants of the palace to, while on another side were the horse stables. Also there was a large shed for bulls and oxen, and separate rows of sheds for milch cattle. On the outskirts were the residences for the workers and bonded labourers of the palace, and many rooms all around for storing guns and ammunitions, bows and arrows, swords and other weapons.

The palace was crowned with seven ornamental pinnacles of gold. People used to say that there was no other palace which could match it anywhere in Tulunadu. The King thereafter built another *Bedra* or *Kelle* (fortress) and a palace in Moodabidre. In this palace resided the members of the Jain royal household. The custom was to have the elder branch of the family at Ullala palace, the junior branch at Moodabidri palace and the formally enthroned King at Kayaramanja palace at Puttige.

The enthroned King was also enjoined upon by a custom that he would not eat unless he received the ritual gift of sandal paste from God Somanatha at Ullala. But since it was difficult to bring the god's ritual gift during the rainy seasons when the rivers would be in spate the King decided to build a temple for God Somanatha at Puttige and began its work. The new temple would face the west; facing it would be a tower to represent the gateway and there would be another entrance with another tower on the eastern side. In the temple yard they dug a pond. After completing the work they decided to have the ritual consecration and installation ceremony on the full moon day of the first month, *Paggu*, of the Tulu calendar. They sent invitation to all the kings and Ballalas of Tulunadu, to all the eminent Jaina, Setti families, to all rich merchants, to the heads of Guttus and Barikes and landlords of the region. They drummed up the announcement up to where the sound of the drum could reach and

sent the messengers to places farther away. Thus was arranged the installation ceremony with great enthusiasm and éclat.

However, though there were then many ruling kings in Tulunadu, they were scared to mention the name of Chennaraya, the Chouta King. This was because under him were as many as sixteen subordinate chieftains, four powerful chiefs of Bunt Guttus, and sixty thousand trained soldiers. The King had acknowledged the status and honour of the heads of the four Guttus and the *daivas* they had adored and endowed them generously with a condition that they would present themselves to service of the king whenever they were summoned. That was the time of plenty and prosperity. That was a time when all rituals and prescribed religious values were observed; trade and commerce flourished; people could freely access the opportunity to read and learn; people were profitably engaged in agriculture or other vocations. There was none who went without work and none unwilling to work. None in the kingdom indulged in fornication, wrong-doing, cheating, dealing in falsehood, trickery, theft, fooling people, gossiping, slandering others, murder and such things. There were no prostitutes anywhere except those assigned the duty of dancing in front of gods. It is said that once a bondsman asked his master, "My Lord! Is thief a person?" None was familiar even with the name of toddy or arrack. Most of the people knew nothing about what poverty was. If any beggar or mendicant ever came to this kingdom from outside, they would invariably build a house of their own and settle down here! The King had appointed people who were authorised to grant anything to anybody who asked for it. If ever his subordinate chiefs or the heads of the Guttus and Barikes faced any difficulties or crises, the King himself would rush to them and help them to tide over their problems. There was no young man in his kingdom not trained in warfare, nor a young woman not adept in folk medicine. If there was any such untrained young man, he would not find a girl to marry; if ever there was such a

young woman without the knowledge of folk medicine, she would find no boy to marry her either. It meant that everyone was adept at whatever they were supposed to be good at. The King honoured everyone according to their caste and social status and ensured social propriety. However, none acknowledged caste as hindrance in sports and games. Thus the King had ordered that people would conduct themselves as children of the same parents and live in harmony. Since the King ensured that the things were so, people used to call him 'Lord' 'The Great Man' 'The Master' and 'God'. Even today people honour him with such names.

Since the King was looking after his subjects as a benevolent father would treat his children, none from this kingdom, not even an insect, chose to step into another kingdom. That is why other kings, whatever their might and power, dared not engage in fight against this King, and were merely left blinking their eyes and gaping their mouths in despair and frustration.

This King had two younger brothers and one younger sister. The younger brothers were living in the palace of Moodabidre. The sister, after giving birth to a girl child, died on the ninth day because of what was diagnosed as postnatal blight. The King affectionately looked after the only girl child of the royal family. The girl was named Siridevi and when she grew up to the stage when she could talk, she was sent to the Brahmin teacher's school and taught the necessary skills in reading and writing. When she grew up further, she was taught the Jaina religious lore, folk medicine and all the hymns, rituals and rites. When she excelled in all these knowledge and skills, she was taught Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata and Jaimini Bharata. Besides, she was taught swordsmanship, horse riding and elephant riding in which she soon excelled even the royal princes.

For the onlookers she looked like a golden ears of paddy. Her beauty, grace and good manners would challenge anybody's powers of description. The girl now is past fourteen and going on fifteen. The

girl had become a woman. If ever a boy could be found to match this matchless girl, the King hoped to celebrate their marriage and have them both stay with him. This girl was so kind that she would personally treat any sick person and stay with them, day and night, till they were cured. That is why everybody in the palace, - from the King to his servants, - used to address her affectionately as 'Mother!' If anybody got anything, the feeling was that it was meant for the 'Mother', and it was as if there was nothing in the kingdom which was not meant for her! To help her all the time the King had appointed seven maid servants. The King had specially ordered them to be at her beck and call. Siridevi was always busy reading or writing, and she would not sit idle even for a moment. On certain occasions she would check the accounts of the palace accountants and set right their mistakes. There was none in the kingdom who would not be discussing her abilities and the fame she had so rightly earned.

The King had ornaments made for her, enough to cover her up from head to toe! Anklets, jingling bells and chains to adorn her feet, silver toe-rings; waist string, ring-chain and ornate golden girdle to adorn her waist; bracelet, tubular bangles, tubular bracelet, bracelet studded with corals, a thick bangle, thin glass bangles, another variety of ornate bracelet, bracelet studded with diamonds, bracelet with jingling bells to adorn her hands, bangles with coral beads and glass bangles to flank them, bracelet made with black beads, resembling a strip of woollen rug to ward off evil eyes, bracelet with screws to join their two ends and strong bangles to adorn her hands; ring with v-shape, and another round one to accompany it, signet ring, ring with red stone, curve-shaped finger ring and ring dedicated god to adorn her fingers; jingling chain, a chain to which flat ornamental gold pieces are attached and worn close to neck, another necklace with dotted gold pieces, necklace that strings together gold coins and another which puts together half- gold coins; necklace made of the purest gold, necklace of the Turkish design,

necklace string together little golden wheels, a chain stringing together moidores, chain putting together gold pieces resembling beaten rice, necklace stringing together little golden pellets, necklace with beads resembling gooseberries, another necklace of the design of swallowwort, necklace made of round gold beads, a necklace made by plaiting golden wires, another kind of golden necklace, a seven-stringed necklace, a string of black-beads, an ornamental necklace with black-beads, chain with amulet, a chain stringing together many vegetable-shaped golden pieces, necklace with gold pieces stamped with the picture of gods and goddesses, necklace with a pendant to announce the marital status of the woman, a necklace to conform to one's luck as denoted by one's stars and chain putting together components resembling golden bamboo pieces to adorn her neck; an ear ornament attached to a chain, a hanging ear- ornament, another ear ornament with an attached string, a crescent-shaped ear-ring, ear-stud, ear ornament with little mirrors for reflecting light, ear ornament with short hair-like design and a golden stick to stick the ear with to adorn her ears; a golden screw-pine to plunge into the hair vertically, and yet another to stick to the hair horizontally, an ornamental jewellery to stick to the topknot, a golden rose, a golden rounded jasmine, a golden tiny jasmine, golden champak, a scissors-shaped golden flower, a string of flower pendants to attach to the plaited hair, a pendant to attach to the parted hair, the braid of false, augmented hair and a jewelled golden pin to adorn it. All these many new ornaments were made for her. The King had also arranged for a silver box for their safe-keeping.

But these jewels were meant more for safe-keeping in the silver box or to give them to the poor on the occasion of their marriage rather than adorning herself with. For her daily use she wore no more jewellery than a pair of sturdy golden bangles, two-stringed golden chains with the design of beaten rice, two finger-rings, golden ear-studs with golden sticks and an ornamental golden pin to stick

to her hair. The King could not help calling her now and then. She would even go the Hall of Justice where the King transacted business and dispensed justice and advise him. If ever she started saying things, there was none who could challenge or refute her. The matters were settled as per her views and verdicts.

This girl would get up early in the morning and go to the cattle shed. She would then inspect the cows and calves; she would brush her teeth and move to the elephant stables and the stables where horses were housed. She would then go to the pond to wash her face; she would pick and collect flowers; she would then proceed to the kitchen and supervise the preparations there; thereafter she would go to the Brahmin teacher's school and tell the students a few parables and impart instructions. From there she would move to the gymnasium and watch wrestling and other bodily exercises. She would then return home, prostrate before the gods and smear sandal paste as the ritual gift of the gods. After all these, she would partake of the rice gruel. After her meal she would go upstairs to her room, settle down to reading story books or tell stories to those who went to meet her. By noon she would have her routine hot water bath and change into fresh saree; she would stand before the mirror and comb her hair; she would then join her uncle for lunch. After lunch she would settle down to a brief siesta. After she woke up she would get busy with inquiring into the work or welfare of all the workers in the palace. In the evening she would go back to the pond and pick flowers in the gardens around and return to her room upstairs. After the lamps were lit in the palace, she would read stories about gods and prostrate before the gods. After her dinner she would play *Chenne* board-game or chess with her maid servants or another kind of board-game like *Ekkadi* or a mock game of tiger, till she decided to go to bed.

Amidst this schedule she yet found time to treat and console the sick. In fact, her versatile life is hard to capture in any narrative!

4.

Tale of the Fourth Month

An evening after the *Chenḍu* festival of Polali, Narna Bhatta, Ranga Bhatta and Narayana Bhatta had assembled at the house of Sankraya Achary. While discussing and gossiping about men and matters in their village, Sankraya Achary posed a question:" Dear Bhatta Sir! There is a belief that the Mother Goddess of this place was created by Surata Raya, is it so?"

Bhatta: "That is what is mentioned in the story of *Dēvi Mahātme.* It says that after cutting off the heads of the demons, Chanda and Munda, the Goddess and her retinue had played a game of foot ball with those decapitated heads. Such stories are part of myths in circulation. Who has seen them?"

Sankraya: "Who is actually in charge of the daily worship in the temple? How many are listed for temple service?"

Bhatta: "There are four prominent ones - the *Tantri,* the priest, *Mayya* and *Naṭṭōja.* Apart from them there are thirty-six families, altogether about a hundred and fifty assistants in temple service.

Sankraya: "Who are they, tell me sir! What are their assigned duties?"

Bhatta: "*Tantri*, the priest for daily worship,

Mayya, and *Naṭṭōja,* are in the higher echelons of priesthood and management. Besides, there are priest- assistants, priests to remove ritual pollution, the Brahmin commissioned to recite Vedas, the Brahmin to read *Dēvi Mahātme,* the Brahmin to narrate and explain *Purāṇas,* the Brahmin to recite the Thousand Names of the Goddess, manual assistant to worshipping priests, manual assistant to cleaning the place of worship, garland-maker, drummer and gong-players, those in charge of fixing wicks and pouring oil to lamps in temple, temple-dancers, the Moily in charge of swabbing the floor, the Moily in charge of sweeping the temple surroundings, the appointed *Beera* or watchman or errand boy, two persons in charge of looking after the temple bull, five trumpeters, five pipers, two persons in charge of readying firewood for the temple, two in charge of fly-whisks, another in charge of the drone, an overseer, a man in charge of incense, four servants to carry the Goddess's palanquin, a manager of the temple affairs, a person in charge of the temple store-room, two persons to hold the five-forked ritual flambeaux, a person to carry the ritual parasol in the temple procession, Moolyas to carry rows of oil-lamps in the temple procession, people to carry jingling poles and flags in the procession, nine persons assigned to the service of the *daivas* to be propitiated, two liveried guards accompanying the procession and so on. All these people and personnel have to be duly honoured and recompensed on specific auspicious occasions or *Pancha Parvas* in the temple. They are all hereditarily attached to the temple, and they cannot be described merely as working for wages. Their families and forebears have been doing these duties from time immemorial. If they fail to do their assigned duties now, the anger of the Goddess gets expressed in some form or the other in their families. That is why they invariably hasten to the temple to perform their assigned duties."

Achary:"Tell me Sir! What are the *Pancha Parvas* held in the temple?"

Bhatta: "On the *Sōṇa Sankrānti* day, the temple should not accept the oblation of coconut and plantains from anybody else except after the house of Amunja Guttu and the *Naṭṭōja's* house had offered them. On the *Sōṇa* month and on an auspicious day, they would ritually 'fill' the temple by tying ears of the newly harvested paddy crop to the doorway, or pillars or the flag-post of the temple and serve a feast of the newly harvested rice. It is the custom of the region for people to carry the auspicious ears of paddy from the temple to tie them in their respective homes and celebrate the feast of the newly harvested rice. The temple would bring the necessary quantity of harvested paddy crops from the field -specially meant to grow such a crop, - on the eastern side of temple which is irrigated by the captive water in the rivulet nearby. Then on the *Chauti* Day[1] people of all the villages would assemble in the temple and play the game of *Tappangāyi*[2] and in the evening a special worship is held. All the devotees who are gathered there would receive as ritual gift of *Appa,* or sweet fried balls of rice dough and jaggery, *Pancha Kajjāya* or another sweet mixture of prescribed components, and a piece of sugarcane. The Guttu houses would get five pieces of sugarcane, a packet of *Appa* and *Pancha Kajjāya* each. *Naṭṭōja* is in charge of these arrangements."

Achary: "What else would take place there?"

Bhatta: Then on the new moon day of *Mārnemi* festival[3] there

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[1] The day when the birth of Vinayaka, the son of Parvati, is celebrated. He is a popular God known to remove the obstacles on the path of those who pray to Him.

[2] The game in which the priest throws the coconut up and young people scramble to catch it to have the honour of breaking it in the name of Goddess at the sacrificial stone.

[3] *Mārnemi* is Tulu version of 'Mahanavami' or 'Navarathri' festival, in which Goddess Durga is worshipped for nine days. In Bengal it is celebrated as Durga Pooja. Since the Polali temple is a Durga temple, this festival has great significance there.

is a custom of setting up a huge cauldron in the temple kitchen in which rice is cooked for the devotees. On the first day of the festival there should be a *Ranga Pooja*[4] held in the name of Amunja Guttu. On the subsequent days *Ranga Poojas* are held in the name of the other Guttus. The temple receives head-loads of rice, grains, jaggery, coconuts, plantains and vegetables as donation from all the Guttu houses. The temple prepares the ritual gifts of the Goddess such as *Appa* and *Pancha Kajjāya* and distributes among the devotees. On the last day of the festival the *Naṭṭōja* would formally give gifts to the functionaries of the temple. On every *Sankrānti* day every Guttu and aristocratic household is required to send fifty coconuts each to the temple. Besides, on the *Parba* day a grand *Ranga Pooja* would be held at the temple, in which rows of lamps would be lit and the Goddess would be taken round the temple in grand procession. From the new moon day ending the *Parba* to the next new moon day next, there would be special daily ritual worship of the Holy Basil. On the full moon day after the *Parba* a special *Pooja* of *Nelli Puṇṇame*[5] would be held. On the full moon month of *Jaarde*,[6] there will be "Festival of Lakhs of Lamps". This festival and the procession of the Goddess are held with great pomp and pageantry. On the *Shashṭi*[7] day the temple will hold a ritual of

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[4] *Ranga Pooja* is a special form of worship in which food oblation, embellished with flowers and rows of lamps lit on either side leading to the *sanctum sanctorum,* is placed in front of God and worshipped.

[5] *Nelli Puṇṇame* worship involves the worship of a branch of gooseberry tree tied to the platform of the Holy Basil on the full moon day following *Deepavali.*

[6] *Jaarde* is the eighth solar month in Tulu calendar, corresponding to mid November to mid December.

[7] *Shashṭi* is the sixth day of the lunar fortnight. The festival of *Shashṭi* is held on that day in the ninth lunar month in honour of God Subrahmanya. The word itself denotes 'Six'.

Maḍesthāna[8] in the temple. Thereafter, there would be the temple Car Festival. It would be followed by a grand procession in which the icon of the Goddess is carried. Not long after that, on a specially chosen auspicious day, the feast of the newly harvested rice would be held. There would another grand *Ranga Pooja* on the following day to be followed by *Gāyathri Pooja.* The ritual propitiation of the folk deities linked to the temple would be held the day after at the main entrance of the temple complex.

There would be another cycle of festivities in the temple for *Shivarāthri.*[9] There would be a *Ranga Pooja*, a Car Festival and devotees would observe ritual fasting and sleepless devotion. On the day of *Sankrānti* in the month of *Suggi* as part of the temple festivities, there would be the ritual hoisting of the flag, a procession of the Goddess for sixteen rounds around the temple among which would include *Kanchilu Sēve* or a procession of little children and calves as devotional, symbolic offerings to the Goddess to ward off

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[8] *Maḍesthana* is a Tulu variant of *Maḍesṅana,* a ritual of rolling oneself over on the ground before the idol of the God Subrahmanya or over the left-over of food after the Brahmin devotees had eaten it. This ritual is performed as part of the vow taken in the name of the God either to redeem a promise or in expiation of some sin committed. The word '*Maḍe*' implies the pollution of food left over after eating it. The idea is that human saliva is a polluting agent. But here rolling over the left-over food of Brahmins is taken as an act of devotion because it is taken as holy, as the Brahmins are considered as gods on earth! Rolling over the temple yard is apparently done as submission to God. The Subrahmanya temples of Tulunadu are linked to serpent worship, and one of the blights that can befall any transgression there is skin disease, and *Maḍesṅana* is prescribed as a cure for it. Whether this is faith or superstition is a matter of perception. The more recent social attitude towards this practice is that it is a superstition to prop up Brahmanical hegemony and hence disapproved.

[9] *Shivarāthri*, according to 'Shiva Purana' marks the emergence of Lord Shiva, as the Great God of the Trinity. It falls on the 13th night of the second fortnight of the eleventh lunar month.

any affliction on them.[10] Thereafter there will be a ceremonial drawing of the temple car. Early in the next morning there will be a ritual propitiation of the folk deity of Renjakasura. The glory of the Goddess would then be drummed up and announced to the people. This temple festival is considered to be truly grand. On the first day they would make a garland of ixora flowers with five strands and the Goddess adorned with it. Every day there would be a Car Festival. On successive days the number of strands in the garlands would be increased by five till they reach twenty on the fourth day. That day the icon of the Goddess would be taken round the temple yard in ceremonial procession. On all the days there will be a ritual foot ball game held in the field in front of the temple. The first is called *Koḍi Chenḍu*, followed by drawing the *Kumāra Tēru*, or temple car dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya. The second day would witness *Poo Tēru* or Flower-decorated Temple Car which will coincide with the ritual of sprouting grains. On the third day there will be *Naḍu Chenḍu*, on which day would be drawn *Sūrya Manḍala Tēru*, or the temple car dedicated to the Sun god. On the fourth day *Chenḍu* or ritual foot ball game, the *Chandra Manḍala Tēru* or the smaller temple car would be drawn. That day the icon of the Goddess would be taken in procession through the town to the *Simhāsana Kaṭṭe* or the 'Throne Platform' where the worship would be preceded by a grand show of gymnastics and swordsmanship. On the last day of the ritual foot ball game the icon of the Goddess will be ceremonially taken in procession in palanquin and on the last day there would be the drawing of the Grand Temple Car after symbolic ritual hunting and worship of the Goddess in the platforms in public places. This will be followed by the formal declaration that

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[10] Here the idea is that the Goddess is the Mother of all and that the children and the calves would be safe in her hands. It involves a procession of children holding rice, betel leaves, areca nuts, mirror, holy pot of water and a lighted lamp and is done as part of fulfilling a vow.

the Goddess has retired for her rest. Early next morning the *sanctum sanctorum* would be formally opened and the Goddess would receive all the articles of vow and oblations from the devotees of the village and the region. That evening the Goddess would head for the river for ritual cleansing bath. Returning to the temple, the temple flag would be cerẹmonially brought down to mark the end of the temple festival. In the days to follow the folk deities attached to the temple will have their ritual propitiations, one after another and at the end of it all the paraphernalia of the *daivas* would return to their respective stations. Then on the day of *Pattanāje* there would be another grand ritual procession of the Goddess, who would then bless the people and devotees and assure them of her sure protection. The Goddess would then retreat into the *sanctum sanctorum*, not to stir out during the lay-off period. These are all the prescribed rituals and practices, man! What else do you need? Tell me!"

Achary: "Tell me sir! Who, by the way, is *Naṭṭōja*? Isn't he a Brahmin? How did he get his name?"

Bhatta: "*Naṭṭōja* is Brahmin of the Naga lineage! They are also called Siva Brahmins. Naga is sometimes called Siva. These people were originally of the temples of Tulunadu. When Brahmins from outside began to come to this region and started worshipping in the temples there, these original Brahmins came to be called "Those of the *Sthānas*" or as the Native Brahmins. Now they are called '*Sthānikas*'. It is said that in the olden days the Turkish rulers had swooped down and plundered the temple of its gold and silver. Thereafter, those who went round the region and villages, begging for resources to the temple to run its daily affairs were called *Naṭṭōjas*.[11] Now the *Naṭṭōja* has become the master of the whole village. At Khera he has fields yielding 800 *khōrjis* of rice.[12]

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[11] *Naṭṭune* in Tulu means 'to beg' and *Naṭṭōja* means a 'mendicant' in the cause of God.

[12] One *Khōrji* is equivalent to 42 *muras* of rice, which is about 1500 kilograms.

Therefore, the people of the region have entrusted him and his family with the management of the temple. Besides, the Chouta rulers had decreed that the *Naṭṭōja* and the head of the Amunja Guttu should manage the affairs of the temple and had granted the necessary endowment, which may be seen commemorated in an inscription. Now all the affairs of the temple are looked after by *Naṭṭōja.* One branch of this family is in Puttur."

Achary: "Why did that branch migrate to Puttur?"

Bhatta: "It seems there was a prevalent custom of sacrificing a buffalo to the *Kshētrapāla* or the sentinel-deity of the temple. That buffalo used to be reared by *Naṭṭōja* in his cattle-shed. One year his brother is said to have replaced that sacrificial buffalo. When it was about to be beheaded, that buffalo seemed to have let out a cry. That buffalo was then promptly let off and the devotees lodged a complaint with the Goddess. As a response, the Goddess seems to have decreed that whoever was behind this mischief should not stay in her jurisdiction anymore. Listening to this, the brother of *Naṭṭōja* and his family left the place by the southern entrance of the temple. The door shut down that day has not been opened till even today. One can see that closed door in the Polali temple even today. The one who had gone to Puttur built a temple there, endowed it with land yielding eighty *khōrjis* of rice and began the tradition of the Puttur Temple Car Festival, and they continue to stay there even today. When the Goddess of Polali ordered that family to visit her, it did not obey her command, and as a result, the Goddess has announced a permanent ban on that family."

Achary: "How many temples there are under the jurisdiction of this temple?"

Bhatta: "In Polali *Kellēshwara* and *Kānchēshwara,* on the Renja Gudde *Mukkaṇṇēshwara,* on the Devara Gudde *Agasthyēshwara,* at Manel *Somanāthēshwara* and *Vishnumūrthy,* at Ganji Mutt *Ganapathi,* at Agrahara *Mukhyaprāṇa,* at Addooru

Amrithēswara and *Vishnumūrthy,* at Amunja *Mahālingēshwara, Ganapathi* and *Vishnumūrthy,* at Bollooru *Kāmēshwara* and six other temples, at Kodmannu *Vanēsha,* at Sujeru *Jaladurgi,* at Sangottu *Mahānkāli,* - all these temples fall under the jurisdiction of the Polali temple. The expenses of running these temples are met by the Polali temple.

Achary: "By the way, how many *bhūtas* are here? When do they come here?"

Bhatta: "On the day when the temple flag is ceremonially hoisted, four *Rājan daivas*[13] arrive here along with their paraphernalia. On the day when the Goddess is taken in procession with a decoration of twenty strands of ixora flowers, three *Mantri daivas* (apparently the adjutant *daivas* to the royal ones) along with their paraphernalia come to the temple. The day after, as many as nine *daiva* impersonators arrive at the temple and participate in the procession."

Achary: "From which all places the *daiva* paraphernalia arrive on the day when the ritual flag hoisting takes place?"

Bhatta: "*Mundadāye's* paraphernalia from Sujeru, *Magrandāya's* from Arkula, *Kodamandāya's* from Ulipady and *Jārandāya's* from Addoor come to the temple. Thereafter the flag is hoisted and the festivities take place until early morning."

Achary: "Which all paraphernalia arrive on the day when the Goddess is adorned with twenty strands of ixora flowers?"

Bhatta: "*Kaniyāra Jumādi's* from Amunja Guttu, *Sārāḷa Jumādi's* from Sangottu, *Kondeli Jumādi's* from Kalavoor, *Marlu Jumādi's* from Pallipady come to the temple."

Achary: "What all are offered to those *daivas* in the temple?"

Bhatta: "After *Ārata* or the temple-festival is concluded, all

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[13] The *daivas* hailed as the 'royal' ones. They constitute a superior class of *daivas.* There is a hierarchy among the deities even as it flourishes among those who worship them.

these *daivas* get their ritual propitiation and are duly given a send off. Then these *daivas* get their own annual propitiations in their respective stations.

Achary: "How many Guttu Heads are linked to this temple?"

Bhatta: "The ritually anointed head of the Saarala Guttu is the first in the list. Then comes the head of Amunja Guttu. He is followed by the head of the Elupady Guttu who is in charge of seven other guttus and is the head of the Ulipady Guttu, under whose jurisdiction there are six other guttus."

Achary: "Which are those six guttus?"

Bhatta: "Tiddillyupady guttu, Mugera guttu, Muttoora guttu, Kulavoora guttu, Sangottu guttu and Sadoora guttu, - these are the six guttus under Ulipady Guttu."

Achary: "Which guttus are connected with Amunja Guttu?"

Bhatta: "Addoora guttu, Baddoora guttu, Bolloora guttu, Merajala guttu, Sujera guttu, Arkula guttu and Kodamannu guttu are under Amunja Guttu, who is the head of this consortium of eighth guttus."

Achary: "Who gets the honour in the temple, hierarchically?"

Bhatta: The first in the list of honour is Amunja Guttu; second, Ulipady Guttu; third, Arkula Guttu; fourth, Tiddillyupady guttu; fifth, Addoora Guttu; sixth, Mugera guttu; seventh, Bolloora guttu; eight, Kulavoora guttu; ninth, Sujera guttu; tenth, Kodmana guttu; eleventh, Sangottu guttu; twelfth, Merajala guttu; thirteenth, Muttoora Guttu; fourteenth, Baddoora guttu; and fifteenth, Sadoora guttu. This is the order in which the temple honours these houses."

Achary: "What contributions or donations these houses offer to the temple?"

Bhatta: "These guttu houses are expected to collect the donations of the houses of devotees in their respective villages or jurisdictions. Besides, every guttu has to give to the temple an annual contribution of five *varahas* and five muras of rice each on the day when the

temple flag is ritually hoisted to inaugurate the festivities."

Achary: "Sir, by the way, what does the temple do with the sarees that the temple receives as response to the vows from devotees?"

Bhatta: "The Goddess of this temple is particularly fond of flowers and sarees. Whatever the number of sarees she gets from the devotees, she should first wear them, and thereafter, sarees should be kept aside in bundles. They should neither be gifted away nor sold. Cheaper sarees would be torn and used to make fire-torches, or made into decorative pennants to the temple car. The costly silk sarees with golden or silver borders would progressively decay in the bundles into which they are tied. The Goddess permits nothing other than this!"

Achary: "But here why do the temple drummers collect vowed donations from lower caste devotees?"

Bhatta: "The reason is this: There is a sentinel deity at the outer northern corner of the temple, holding a massive sword. The vowed donation to that deity is collected by the drummers of the temple and they have to conduct its regular worship and sacrifices. The sentinel deity is the custodian of the locality. The same people are entrusted with the responsibility of worshipping *Bhadra Mānkāḷi.*[14] The vowed donation to this goddess is also collected by this group. There is also on the outer skirt of the temple premises and in the southern corner, a Durga shrine. This is the family goddess of *Naṭṭōja*, who is responsible for its worship."

Achary: "But tell me sir! What work do these *Tantris*, priests and *Mayyas* do in this temple?"

Bhatta: "The *Tantri* has to ritually purify the temple or its precincts if things go wrong there in matters of worship and

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[14] *Bhadra Mānkāḷi* or *Bhadra Mahankāḷi* is a fierce edition of Goddess Durga, feared and propitiated with blood sacrifices.

performance of rituals. When the *Tantri* arrives at the temple, it is the duty of *Naṭṭōja* to inform the heads of guttus about it. Thereafter the *Tantri* performs his duties. The Priest has to collect the keys of the temple every morning and open its doors. Then he has to perform the daily worship at the temple, lock the temple doors and hand over the keys to *Naṭṭōja. Mayya* has to carry the idol of the Goddess and take it in procession thrice a day after the *pooja*, from *Parba* to *Pattanāje.* All the temple servants should attend to their duties during this period. Those who fail to comply will be imposed a fine by the head of Amunja Guttu, *Naṭṭōja* and the other eminences of the region, and they will be taken back to service only after they pay the fine. All the affairs of the temple inside will be under the *Tantri,* the Priest and *Mayya,* and if anything goes amiss, they should take the matter to *Naṭṭōja.* This power is entrusted only to these people, and does not extend to anybody else in the region. This is a long, endless story! This year the Chouta king of Puttige has built a new temple to Lord Somanatha, and has plans to install its pinnacle formally on the full moon day next."

Achary: "When is that? How many days more to go? Shall we go there too?"

Bhatta: "That is why there is a saying, 'Achary is mad after *Aayana*!'[15] We shall certainly go there if you wish. I think there is yet another ten days to go. Look! The trumpeter Beera is here! He should know everything. You ask him!"

Achary: "By the way, Beera, when do the festivities at Puttige begin? Have they planned them in a grand manner? Do you expect a big gathering there?"

Beera: "What are you saying, Sankraya Achary, sir? I am now coming from Mijar. As I was coming I saw five hundred head-loads

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[15] *Aayana* is the temple festival.

of *gendāḷi* tender coconuts[16] and other prestations being taken there in bullock carts. They are constructing new roads on all the four sides of the temple. No house goes unrepresented in this expressive devotion of sending prestations in kind to the temple. It appears that there will be two thousand head-loads of prestations to be sent to the temple from the Guttu house of this place on the next Tuesday. You cannot step into the Guttu even today. It is crammed with things meant to be sent to the temple."

Achary: "Tell me, Beera! Who are all the kings expected to go there?"

Beera: "The king of Karkala, king of Suralu, the king of Padubidre, the king of Yermal, and the Banga King, and such other kings of Tulunadu will congregate there. I do not know when such grand temple festival will be held in our life time! I do not know how they would use such huge quantities of vegetables and other donations reaching there!"

Achary: "Is there not a saying about these Jainas that they would much rather allow things to rot than give them away in charity? This will rot, for sure!"

Beera: "Yes, they will rot, certainly, because, we cannot finish eating them! Merchants and traders have already gone there to set up their shops and marts. If we have to go there, we should set out on Friday, early in the morning."

Bhatta: "Why in the morning? We may set out in the evening and reach there at night. All the pomp and festivities there would be at night.

Beera: "You may set out only in the evening. But I should accompany the head of the Guttu. It seems he has plans to leave on the

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[16] *Gendāḷi* tender coconuts are golden-coloured, and are prized for their medicinal qualities. The *daiva* shrines or the temple flag-posts are also preferably decorated with this variety of coconuts. They look beautiful too.

afternoon of Thursday. But I can be sure of it only when I go home.

Achary: "Tell me, Beera! Who are all likely to accompany the head of the Guttu?"

Beera: "When he leaves, many young men of the house are sure to join him. Besides, he should be accompanied by his and his God's 'symbols of status'."

Achary: "What 'symbols of status' should accompany him?"

Beera: "Whatever the king had donated to God, such as, one golden palanquin, two humped bulls, two flags with lunar symbols on them, two embroidered green flags with pictures of birds and leaves on them, and another two such white flags, one golden umbrella with decorated fringes, another umbrella of silver, two pieces of green turban cloth to swing around during the procession, two plaited palm-leaf fans, two green fly-whisks, two white fly-whisks, two spears, each with a circular jingling attachment, two gold-ferruled wooden staffs, a ceremonial weapon with sharp, thorny end, a golden vessel with a spout, one gold-framed mirror, four sword-wielding men, two watchmen, two horsemen, two pipers, two drummers, two persons to wield five-pronged torches, four trumpeters, four musicians with pipers and percussionists, some palanquin-bearers, a troupe of dancers, one person to carry the tall ceremonial umbrella, two men to carry festoon-like flags during procession, two guards, tenants and workers and people to carry rags and clothes, - when all these people have to go, there wouldn't be less than two hundred people. But this time the number may shoot up to three to four hundred! The information and invitation will go to every guttu of the region. All of them will go together."

Achary: "Where will these people be put up?"

Beera: "Why should we worry about it? The lord of the Guttu will meet all our expenses. Brahmin cooks of the palace will feed us to our fill. But we should not fail to turn up when the lord of the Guttu summons us."

Achary: "Tell me, Beera! How far is Puttige from here?"

Beera: "Not really far! From Manel to Ane it is a distance of One Cry. From Ane to Deppadavu, one of One Shout, from there to Mijar it is a distance which one could carry a head-load till the next resting platform. From Mijar to Todar, the distance is just the one which the sound of trumpet can reach. If you climb up the plateau there, you can hear the din of people of Puttige talking!"

Achary: "I just don't make out anything of your 'cry', 'shout', 'the resting platform', that yard, this distance, 'the sound of the trumpet' and all that. How many *haradāris*[17] that would be? Tell me."

Beera: "How far? If you walk down the narrow passage at Ane and go straight, not more than three *haradāris*. Not more."

Achary: "In that case we should set off early."

Bhatta: "If we are to start very early, I cannot come. If we are to leave after I finish the evening worship, I may join you. I have none at home who can perform the worship. If we are to leave after the evening worship, Ranga Bhatta and Narna Bhatta may also join us. If we start a little late in the evening, there will be many more joining us. But I should return early at daybreak, by the time there is light enough for us to see each other's face."

Beera: "Why not we return, if we leave that place early enough? We can return conveniently, in time."

Bhatta: "Sankraya Achary! Please find out who are all likely to join us. The more the merrier; we will enjoy walking in moon light. We may not feel the strain at all."

Beera: "You all come, any number of you! I will take care of all the arrangements there."

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[17] *Haradāḷri* is approximately four miles. The other measures are what the folk are familiar with, -inexact, but what people convey or use in their day-to-day lives.

Bhatta: "Ah! If we trust you, it will be like trusting a jackal to carry out farming on the paddy field.[18] Where will you be, and where we are likely to be? Anyway, forget about it. If we are to go, we certainly will."

When Bhatta said this, seven or eight young men around announced their decision to join him and left the place. Bhatta, Beera and Sankraya Achary sat there for some more time, chewed their betel leaves and nuts and left the place too.

* * *

[18] Jackal is perceived to be an embodiment of deceit, and hence untrustworthy. It is an allegory to any person who is untrustworthy. There is another Tulu saying similar to the one mentioned above. '*Kudkanu nambudu kōri sānkilekka ānḍu*', (It is like entrusting the welfare of your chickens to a jackal!)

5.

Tale of the Fifth Month

After the palace was built at Moodabidre, the place became a big town. Many rich Jains and Ballalas settled down there. The ruler brought sculptors and trained artists from different parts of the country and built *basadis* in stone. The Chouta ruler then handed over the management of the town to *Paṭṭaṇasheṭṭi.* The Jaina *sheṭṭis* and rich merchants built sixteen *basadis* and *mutts* and settled their preceptors there. These *swamis* were provided with every facility and convenience by the *Paṭṭaṇasheṭṭi.* The biggest and the most spectacular building of all the buildings there is the Thousand-pillared *basadi,* which is also called *Sribhuvala Chaityālaya.* After it was built the town got the name of *Jaina Kāshi.* Since this *Basadi* houses all the scriptures and holy books of the Jain religion and all their gods and goddesses, the Jains reckon the place as even greater than Kashi. Jains from all parts of the country come to this place to see the Thousand-pillared *basadi.* In the Jaina *Mutt* there is a holy book called *Nidāna,* renowned among the Jains.

The house of the Choutas had won fame and influence all over Tulunadu. Therefore, there was a royal order that in all the annual festivities of temples and

daiva shrines such as *aayana, kōla, nēma,* etc. flags should be hoisted figuring the image of the nude gods of Jainas. This tradition has continued even after the Chouta royal power vanished. Even today the image of a dangling *garuḍa* is made out of straw and hoisted as a flag on the temple flag-post when any temple festivities begin. Forget it!

Here the custom is that at the time of the Chouta King's coronation, the King has to be led to the throne by the head of the Saminottu Guttu, seat him on the throne and stand on the right side. The head of the Amunja Guttu should slip the royal signet ring into the King's finger and stand on the left side of the throne. The head of Thokuru Guttu should ritually hand over the royal sword and stand on the right side, a step below. The head of Inna Guttu would hail the name of the enthroned king thrice, salute him and compliment him on behalf of all and stand on the left side at a step below. Thereafter every eminence gathered there would offer to the newly enthroned King presents and prestations. The King then would offer everyone betel leaves and nuts and seat them in the hall. These are some of the traditions and customs enjoined upon by the royalty. For now, enough of those details.

All preparations were afoot, from all parts of Tulunadu, to reach the necessary things by bullock carts to the new temple at Puttige. There was one pandal to store vegetables of all kinds; there was another huge store-room to stock the provisions bought from the town; there was another vast pandal where the guests would be provided refreshments and repast; there was another corner where plantain leaves were stacked up; on another side was a big kitchen; adjacent to it was a big dining hall. Besides, there were people in charge of accounting for the head-loads contributions received from various persons and places, serving refreshments to the servants who carried and brought them. There were a number of *shānbhōgues* entrusted with the responsibilities of providing things to people who needed and demanded them.

Today eminent guests from far and near are streaming in to the palace of Moodabidre. They include the Banga king, Ajila king, the kings of Karkala, Moolki, Bailangadi, Kutyara, Vitla, Kumble and Kolathanadu; the *pergaḍes, ballālas, kamboḷi-heggaḍe* and their relatives and retinues. Besides, the kings of Suralu, Yermalu and Padubidre and their wives, children and members of their families, relatives and friends also reached there. There were soldiers of many kinds, elephants, cavalry and infantry. There were heads of the guttus, and landlords too. They all came to Moodabidre. All the eminent guests were suitably housed; and the King's brothers took over the charge of providing the necessary provisions for the distinguished guests. Besides, people from all parts of the country, carrying their provisions and victuals to manage their journeys, reached the place. There were people everywhere, their noise everywhere. They had settled down wherever they thought it was convenient for them, - be on the streets or lanes, under the shade of the tree or where they could find water source, -to cook and eat their meals. The people who had journeyed for the temple festival reached the place to take the vantage position and enjoy the occasion.

On all the four sides of the temple were shops and marts, and they were bustling with people. In one corner were young boys busy with the game of 'coconut-ramming'; in another corner there were bigger boys engaged in cock-fights; there were a few sturdy ones too, hooked to the game of *Tappangāyi*, scrambling for the coconuts thrown up to break them against the sacrificial altar; at another corner were some shrivelled old men singing the ritual songs in praise of *daivas;* there were sprinklings of women, telling stories to those who were keen to listen to them; there were, here and there, coquettish women trying to win over men; there were small urchins grappling with each other; on the nearby fields there were *koragas* dancing to the tune of their own drums; in another corner of the fields mock-fights were taking place, where there were also

players demonstrating stick-fights. In the gallery around the temple yard there were women of *guttus* and *barke,* who had come from far and near; in the inner yard of the temple were the Brahmins busy reciting the scriptures; on the mats spread at the main entrance of the temple were seated the kings and heads of guttus and landlords and on the balcony sat the women of royalty, on the mats and rugs spread for them.

When in the afternoon the ritual worship of the holy pot at the temple was drawing near, the King of Kayaramanja palace was sent the intimation and invitation. At that time the King had finished his meal and reached the main hall. Wearing a silk cloth, covering his upper body in a silk shawl with gold-embroidered borders and wearing his royal headgear, he sat grandly on the royal throne. He was holding the royal ceremonial sword and was carrying bow and arrows. He was being fanned by comely maidens. He gave gifts of betel leaves and nuts to the heads of guttus. Thereafter he proceeded towards the royal elephant and sat on its decorated howdah. He was now preceded by servants carrying poles of jingling bells, and those beating drums. Behind them were bowmen. There were men to carry the various insignia of royalty. They were accompanied by trumpeters, pipers, drummers, tambourine-players and conch-blowers. Ahead of the king the head of the Saminottu guttu stood, on the horseback, carrying the golden ceremonial sword. The head of Amunja Guttu, holding the golden ceremonial spear, sitting on a white horse, stood on the right side of the king. The head of Thokuru guttu, holding the golden bow and arrows, sitting on a red horse, stood on the left side of the king. The head of the Inna guttu, holding the golden javelin, sitting on a horse, stood behind the king. Behind these people were soldiers in uniform. In between were women of the royal family who joined the procession in various types of palanquins such as *reenjay, manchil, danḍye and ḍooli.* Around them were maid servants in great number. When the procession

began to move, the trumpeter blew his trumpet. The one holding the royal parasol moved to the front. He was followed by the blowers of curved horn and drummers. The procession consisted of no less than ten thousand enthusiasts.

When the King was moving slowly and grandly on the howdah of the caparisoṇed royal elephant, on whom was held the royal umbrella, it looked as if a huge serpent was advancing with its raised hood. After the procession reached the temple, the King got down from the elephant, washed his hands and feet in the temple pond and moved to his special seat. The heads of the guttus took their assigned seats. The women of the palace went up and sat in the balcony. The maid servants guarded them by turn.

Then the King signalled the commencement of the daily worship in the temple and sent invitational message with token betel leaves and nuts to the palace of Moodabidre. The messenger tendered his obeisance, presented the betel leaves and nuts, and prostrated before the royalty there to say that the King had conveyed his message that it was time for them to reach the temple. Then they set off forthwith, - the kings on their elephants, the heads of guttus on horsebacks, the young men of the guttus on bullock carts, the women of the royal family in palanquins of various types. By the time the procession in its pomp reached the temple, two hundred and fifty swivel guns were ignited in a show of spectacular pyrotechnics. When this grand signal was sounded for the arrival of the procession, it had not stopped moving out of Moodabidre. Approximately the number in the procession seemed to have touched twenty five thousand! When the elephants and horses in the procession reached the *bākimāru* field, the Chouta King and the heads of the guttus, moved out with their royal retinue and insignia to receive the guests. They expressed their words of honour; those on the elephants were helped to get down one by one; they were led to the temple pond to wash their hands and feet and taken to the main entrance of the temple and

were duly seated in their assigned places. They were offered refreshing drinks. They were also offered betel leaves and nuts as token of respect. Then the crowned King went up to the balcony. There at the balcony Siridevi was busy talking to guests, serving them with drinks to sate their thirst and honouring them suitably with betel leaves and nuts.

By that time the auspicious moment to install the sacred *kalasha* or the temple pinnacle, was at hand. The priestly Brahmins sought the permission of the King to go ahead with the ritual. Permission received, the *kalasha pooja* was held, and the main *kalasha* was solemnly worshipped with great grandeur by the *Tantri*. Then the trumpeters and drummers sounded their presence once more and there were three rounds of circumambulations to the temple. The consecrated temple pinnacle was taken up the roof and formally installed there by the temple priest. That was accompanied by another round of two hundred fifty explosions of pyrotechnics by igniting swivel guns. God alone knows how many people had gathered there to watch the spectacle and how densely! If you throw up fistful of mustard seeds, not a grain of it would reach the ground! On all four sides one could see people moving in like endless lines of ants, but not even one in a hundred was seen going back!

As soon as the temple-pinnacle was installed and the grand *pooja* performed, the Brahmins got up to partake of their grand meal. Thereafter all the castes were fed. Realising that it would be late in the night by the time they would get their meal, some of them went round for a stroll. As the time passed, more and more people started congregating around the temple. The crowd had filled the area as far as one's shout could reach. There were crowds, shops and noise everywhere. On one corner were shops selling groundnuts, concentric rings of fried rice savouries, broiled rice and beaten rice. On another corner there were shops selling plantains, coconuts, tender coconuts with beaten rice to go with them. At another corner

of the fair were shops selling mangoes, jack fruits and watermelon. There were spots where they sold toys and trinkets to amused children. Another corner contained shops selling sandal wood, red sandal wood, ivory art works made by craftsmen. There were also shops selling snuff, betel leaves and nuts, tobacco leaves and marijuana. On the *bākimāru* field were shops selling textiles from different parts of the country such as saree, blouse pieces, bath towels, waist cloth, mini-saree, cleaning towels and hand-kerchiefs, dark blue cloth worn by the poor, white auspicious cloth, green cloth, turbans and long white waist cloth. By the side of the temple yard there were shops selling flowers, vermilion, incense sticks, frankincense, camphor, sandal wood oil and containers for sandal paste or holy ashes. There were spots which would sell sweet drinks made of hot water mixed with jaggery. In another corner were shops selling fried balls of sweet rice dough, fried sweet stuffed-balls of rice dough, sweet potatoes, soft variety of jack fruit and sugarcane, which were being sold in large baskets.

As part of the fair there were, under the shades of trees, bullocks and their carts, horses and elephants. On the upper *bākimāru* field there were bangle shops selling glass bangles and some stronger varieties of them, black bangles, twisted bangles, and locally made bangles. There were fancy stores selling chains of black beads, chains of white beads, chains of red beads, chains to chase away the bane of evil eyes, necklace with pendants, jingle bells, large and small, shiny threads of different colours like black and red, metal marts selling copper, bronze and brass tumblers, plates to serve meals in, bowls, vessels with spouts, little cylindrical tumblers with little ladles, frying pans, pots, cooking pans, water pots, cauldrons, drums to store water in, large vessels to cook rice or curry, which were all laid out in the fair in long rows. There were people all over, people selling things and people buying things. People were roaming about everywhere, buying what they wanted, seriously inquiring about the

prices of things they did not want to buy, eating or chewing things. In some corner, some aboriginal people had been selling protective covers against rains made of plaited palm-leaves and parasols made of coconut leaves. There were carpenters sitting in some corners selling *chenne-maṇe,* pickle-jars, ploughs and yokes; there were black-smiths selling scythes, knives, scissors, special knives for toddy-tappers, scythes for harvesting crops, scythes attached to wooden seat to cut vegetables or fish, grating boards and such other things.

Since people realised that it would be long before the God's procession would begin, - not certainly before midnight, - they started moving aimlessly in the fair. Long before the sunset, people of all kinds, - infants and children, men and women - had moved into the place as ants were drawn into it. In this noise and crowd were our men from Polali, like Narayana Bhatta, Sankraya Achary, the *padārthi,* Ishwara, Somappa Moily, Jaaru Moolya and about twenty others. On the way they were talking to people, laughing at things, occasionally hopping around, at times trying to overtake one another playfully, not missing an opportunity to exchange ribaldry with people, playing pranks and pulling each other's legs, sometimes waxing into extempore poetry till they reached the bustling fair. The area was so well and extravagantly lit that they thought a whole hill range was up in flames! They went to the fair, inquiring about the price of anything they fancied, haggling over prices, mimicking and play-acting, regaling people, and they wandered all over the place before they settled down in a corner of the field. They yet continued their ways. There is a saying going around that "The pranks of Polali, the coquetry of Manela and the mischief of Addoor are so notorious that even the *daivas* who chanced to go there would take to their heels!" Now I need not tell you what these people in the group, born and brought up in these three places were not capable of doing!

But everyone knows that not everyone goes to temple fairs and

festivals out of any devotion to gods. Many go there to do business and earn their livelihood. Some go there to make money by cheating and hoodwinking the gullible who throng there. Some would seek to see or participate in games and fun. A good number will be there to gossip and tell dirty jokes. Some go there to eat broiled rice, fried savouries and fruits of many kinds. Some go there just because they cannot resist the pressure of women at home to make the trip. Many adventurous young men go there in search of coquettish girls and needle or titillate them with provocative words and gestures. Some women go there to show off their newly bought jewellery and sarees and dresses, and flaunt their image of richness. Since all types of people go to temple festivities under various mad compulsions, an adage is born: "Are people insane or the fair itself?" Whatever it may be, it is easy to see a rampant madness of the people gathered there. With its noise of drums big and small, pipes and trumpets, the cacophony of people's shouts and laughter, the fair and festival were producing a strange sound, not unlike the roar of the sea in the rainy month of *kārthel*. But that did not prevent the young men gathering in some corners to have their own choice of fun and enjoyment. For today, till the daybreak, they have all the freedom to choose their fun. Since the good and elderly people had wisely stayed at home, let young boys and girls decide upon their modes of adventure. After all, it is only for one day, is it not?

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6.

Tale of the Sixth Month

After the royal procession from Moodabidre palace reached the temple, Siridevi with her aunt seated the palace women in the room at the balcony, arranged to distribute drinks to sate their thirst and betel leaves and nuts to chew, placed a small piece of jasmine garlands in their hair-do, and sat with them, inquiring into their health and welfare. At that time the queen of Suralu asked the Chouta queen, "By the way, how many children do you have?"

The Chouta Queen: "What shall I say about my children? I gave birth to as many as four. One lived for three years. It was a wonderful child! And so intelligent! But perhaps it was not meant for us. When it was three, it left us after just one day's illness! The other three children died within a month or two after their birth. Now I have no problem with children! But what am I to do? When I see small, cute children, I grow fond of them. God has not decreed that I should have children of my own." Saying this, the queen shed copious tears. Then she asked the queen of Suralu, "How many children do you have?"

The Suralu Queen: "By the by, how old is that girl? Is she married already? O, yes! I have two sons and

two daughters. The son is the eldest of them"

The Chouta Queen: "That is wonderful! How old is your eldest son?"

The Suralu Queen: "He will be completing twenty five by next *Kārthel.* In fact, I gave birth to him on the fifteenth of the *Kārthel* month, at noon, when the rivers were in floods in the rainy season. His ways are different. He is always found reading and writing. That apart, he wouldn't lift a straw. If advised not to read continuously he wouldn't listen to anybody. But his father is very happy about him. What am I to do?"

The Chouta Queen: "The same is true of my house too. After my husband educated our niece, it is very difficult to talk to her! Whatever we say, it will be met with replies, which we cannot reply to, as they are all supported with *shāstras* and scriptures. Even the *Swāmi* of the *Mutt* and the *Indras*[1] cannot win an argument with her. After studying all our religious texts, now she has started studying those of the Brahmins, like *Ramāyaṇa, Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata.* Why should girls study so much? Did we all study to become queens in our palaces? Why do women need to be literate? To count the number of times they clear the hearth of its ashes? Is it to keep an account of the number of earthen vessels broken in the kitchen? Is it to do the job of the accountant in the palace? Why do the girls need to be literate, I say? But they wouldn't listen! If something goes wrong, then they will learn their lessons. Why should we bother about it?"

The Suralu Queen: "Is your niece here or has she stayed behind?"

The Chouta Queen: "That is the girl! The one who gave you betel leaves and nuts and fixed flower on your hair-do! I will call her. You may talk to her." She then called Siridevi, "Dear! My dear girl! Please come here!"

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[1] *Indras* are the priests in Jain *basadis.*

Then Siridevi replied, "Yes, I am coming! I will come after talking to these guests. Till then be busy with your conversations! Yes, I am coming!"

The Chouta Queen: "She is not married yet. She completed fourteen last *Suggi* and is at present running fifteen."

The Suralu Queen: "O, just that. It means she is very young! Is there any proposal coming for her?"

The Chouta Queen: "Why not? There are indeed many. In our entire royal family, there is but one heir-apparent, like the sole solution to our problems. But her uncle finds none suitable. He needs a boy from a famed royal family, besides being handsome, able, intelligent and heroic. He should match her in education too. He should be available to stay with us in our palace to manage its affairs. Since all these conditions are not met, no alliance is seen as acceptable. If she could be given in marriage to any ordinary boy, we could have done it long back!"

The Suralu Queen: "Doesn't she have her father? Has her mother come here?"

The Chouta Queen: "Her mother died when the child was just nine days old. Her father fought the battle against the Bangas year before last, and died of the wounds. This girl is looked after by her uncle only. No one is allowed to talk against her. She has seven maid servants to serve her all through the day and night. If she asks for tiger milk, they would bring it forthwith!"

The Suralu Queen: "Tell me, how many *seers* would this golden cestus of yours weigh? Is it new?"

The Chouta Queen: "They say it weighs seven and a half *seers*. We got it made for my wedding. Now we have such things in new fashion. My niece's golden girdle seems to have seven and a half *seers* of gold in it. But we do not know how much of gold the goldsmith has pilfered!"

The Suralu Queen: "The other day, they had bought a pair of a

golden ankle chain to Mardevi, my elder sister's daughter. It has a number of rings. That is also said to contain five *seers* of gold. It is wonderful to look at, I tell you! When I told my husband that he should get one such pair to my daughter, Nagini, he fretted and fumed in anger."

The Chouta Queen: "By the way how much did you pay for this saree of yours? It is very impressive! It is stiff like wooden plank!"

The Suralu Queen: "I am sick of demanding sarees! Whenever I talk about saree, blouse, and jewellery, my husband's face goes red in anger! This is the one which my son Ananthraju bought for me to attend this function. He said he had paid one hundred and fifty *varahas*.[2] He had bought another two, of sixty *varahas* each."

At that time Siridevi came there smiling, and joined them. She asked her aunt, "Have you been talking to the guests? Yesterday when I wanted to go to Moodabidre, my uncle said that you would all be coming to the temple, and bade me to bring you here the next day and that we could talk at any length of time. That is why I stayed back. Otherwise my aunt and I would have gone to Moodabidre. Who else, among women, have come here from the palace?"

The Suralu Queen: "We are six from our palace. Two of them are my sisters-in-law, and three others are my sisters."

Siri: "Where are they seated?"

The Suralu Queen: "Look, this is my sister, the king's brother's wife. The others are seated on that side."

Siri: "I am sure you knew my aunt already. But I have not seen you so far. In fact, it is for the first time that I have come out of the palace. I have not stirred out, until today. Only once did I go to the Ullala palace on the occasion of *Nōmpu*.[3] I had returned on the

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[2] A coin of four rupees. So called because it carried the emblem of a boar, an incarnation of Vishnu.

[3] *Nōmpu* is the celebration of *Anantana Chaturdashi* among Brahmins. It denotes certain rituals connected with the worship of *Thīrthankaras* among Jains.

third day. I do not know too many of my relatives. How do we know them if we do not get to see them? What do you say?"

The Suralu Queen: "Yes, yes, you are right! You alone dared to come here! In our area, the girls about to reach the age of puberty are not allowed to stir out of the house."

Siri: That is all nonsense! When the Turks were ruling us it seems they were grabbing beautiful women and taking them away. That is why the girls were not allowed to go out. Now girls hide themselves even when their own people visit their homes? Why should they? These days you see our own people ruling over our lands. Now we have no such fears. Why should pubescent girls hide themselves like so many thieves? 'If you are virtuous you can live alone on a hill'. Am I right?"

The Suralu Queen: "Yes, my girl! Those who are educated can understand the history of yesteryears. What do we, the uneducated, know? We cannot even clear the hearth of its accumulated ash, cook our food and eat it well. By the way, my dear! Is the ornament on your hands new?"

Siri: "This is old! This is what I wear every day. I have many new ornaments which my uncle had got made for me. They are all under lock and key. I don't wear more ornaments than this. Why? If you cover your body with too many pieces of jewellery, you cannot even lie down in comfort and sleep! But if I do not put on gold jewellery both my uncle and aunt get angry. My aunt scolds me and saddles me with more ornaments even when I tell her not to. I do not know why. Do I become a different person if I flaunt my jewellery? It is enough if girls are intelligent and virtuous. If one has a lot of gold on her and yet turns out to be evil-minded, of what use that is? 'Virtue alone is golden' is a right adage. For the virtuous, glittering sarees or heavy jewellery are unnecessary. Honestly, I do not like bedecking myself with jewellery. The money we spend on sarees and jewellery may as well be used to lend to the needy without

having to charge interest on them. Do the rich become poor if they do not adorn themselves with ornaments, or do the poor become rich if they flaunt their jewellery? No! Am I right?"

The Suralu Queen: "Yes, dear! The rich do not become poor. But when we go to attend any function with people of our status, we should at least show to be of that status and maintain our honour, shouldn't we?"

Siri: "If the rich need to put on gold in such functions to show themselves as rich, do the poor become rich if they flaunt their borrowed jewellery? If you talk to them the cat will be out of the bag. Won't it? If one has to attend the function this way, it is better that one does not go there at all. Even if they do not put on a piece of gold on them, the rich do not become poor."

The Suralu Queen: 'What you say is right! But if we do not put on gold and jewellery to show our richness and status, the poor will not even let us pass on the streets. That is why when you go around places, you should put on the jewellery you have, dear"

Siri: "It is a wonderful argument! If what you say is true, will people on the streets prostrate before prostitutes if they are as well bedecked with gold and pompous sarees as queens and women of royalty are? No! 'The saying that one should salute a prostitute if she is virtuous' is not in any way connected with their ability to show off their jewels on their bodies. If a woman is intelligent, virtuous and well-mannered, anybody should give her respects. If she has none of these things, whatever the amount of jewellery she carries on her person, people will only make snide remarks when she turns her back!"

The Suralu Queen: "Whatever you may say, without enough gold and good saree, it is beneath the dignity of women to go out of their house or talk to civilized people, isn't it?"

Siri:"But they should not do anything beneath their dignity or what may ruin their honour. A woman of easy virtues should be

ashamed of going out. Such a woman will put on gold even if it is borrowed ones. If she does not wear enough jewellery and then seduce people, who will care to look at her? For people like us, it is just the same, whether we have jewellery on us or not. If people insinuate us that we are too poor to put on gold, we have nothing to be ashamed of it. We do not in any way become small on that account. On the other hand, if we insist on being simple, we will have greater honour. People do not say anything against our love for gold just because they fear the power of the palace. But when we hear the rude comments people make against women in love of gold, we cannot but acknowledge that such a love is nothing short of madness. In fact, if we are able to stop wasting huge sums of money on gold, at least the poor stand some chance of coming out of their poverty."

The Suralu Queen: "When you say these things, they sound so convincing. But our ancestors have set up certain standards and established certain practices. Were they really a set of ignorant people?"

Siri: "None of us practises what our ancestors have prescribed for us. Look at our gods! Have they been wearing even a piece of cloth? Were they short of cloth? When we say that they had attained *nirvāṇa,* it means that they were like great *swāmis.* Tell me why do they need anything? Are they poor? Are they shameless? Don't the poor allow these *swāmis* to walk on the streets? Do people prostrate before them and worship them by looking at their gold and glittering dresses? No! People look at their wisdom, virtues, knowledge and such things and pay obeisance to them. Similarly, if wear decent, clean sarees to cover our modesty and have ornaments appropriate to our marital status and dignity and be well-mannered, the honour that we gain with them is more than a match to what loads of golden jewellery may confer. The honour we may get by looking at our glittering sarees, gold and jewellery can be nothing more than the

dazzle of a transient lighting at night. The next moment it will all be dark, surely! Therefore, if we live within our limits, we may be as visible at night as we do during the daytime. If people do not quite understand our virtuous thoughts and acts, hearing and knowing about us, they will laud us in our absence. It is so much better if people laud us in our absence, though they may not say anything to us directly, than praise us in our presence and deride us in our absence!"

The Suralu Queen: "These thoughts of yours sound convincing. From today I will not waste money on gold and jewellery, whatever the advice to the contrary. This you can be sure!"

Siri: "I was not commenting on you putting on gold and jewellery. All women of royalty do that. Last year the niece of Banga king, - the one given away in marriage to a boy in Venur, - appears to have loaded her ten year old daughter with ornaments from head to toe and sent her out to play with her maid servants. It seems a thief saw that girl, enticed her with some things to eat, took her away and killed her before taking away her ornaments. See, just because the girl was exhibiting all those ornaments, the only daughter lost both her life and her ornaments. That is why even children should not have too many ornaments on their persons. If you load them with too much as a show of affection, this is the kind of fate that befalls them. Instead of gold, if only the children are given a regular bath and kept clean and fed well and put on the cradle or bed, how well they look!"

The Suralu Queen: "O God! Look at his cruel heart! Couldn't he have taken only the gold and spared the child? How could he bring himself to kill an innocent child? Damn his hard heart!"

Siri: "These days you do not talk about heart and mind, sin and virtues. People do anything for the sake of money. That is why one should spend one's money for the larger good of society. If we gad about flaunting our silk sarees and gold ornaments, our society does

not get better. Instead, it would be as if we ourselves destroy our people. Because, by looking at our gold and jewellery, the poor people too would wish to imitate us. They would not spend their hard-earned money they would not spend on their food and other necessities of life. What is the use of spending it on gold, instead? This is merely the madness of meaningless imitation! When everyone is trying to imitate the rich or pretends to be prosperous, our society speedily slides into ruin. That is why we should be simple and less ostentatious when we attend functions like this. People will then watch us, give up their madness for jewellery, and settle down to a more comfortable life. If poor people are happy, our kingdom will be happy. If the fence starts grazing in the field it is meant to protect, who shall protect the crops? Who will treat our insanity?"

The Suralu Queen: "You are right, dear! I will never forget your words till my death! Yes, we have seen women going after gold and jewellery, and caring a damn for their honour and sinking into immorality. If a woman loses her virtue, whatever the gold and jewellery she owns, it is like a bitch with generously endowed udder! As you say, it is enough if a woman has enough ornaments and clean dress to state her wifely status. More than that is nothing short of madness. You are right, my dear, you are right! By the by, who is that child sleeping there?"

Siri: "That is of my younger uncle. See the ornaments it is burdened with! The body of the child is covered with scabs all over. Anyone who wants to hold the child will be repelled. And yet, see the gold which covers it! Tell me why? This child is two years old. Even now it cannot walk. If children are washed well twice a day and their limbs, armpits and all are cleaned well and are fed carefully and regularly, they would not get any scab on their bodies. They would look smart and cheerful. If children are disinclined to eat, most women tend to place them in supine position, close their noses and thrust food down their gullets. Poor thing! Why should they be

fed with such desperation and in such cruelty? Will the children survive and prosper? Sometimes many children are fed so much and so often that they have only protruding bellies and receding bottoms! They look like ugly, lifeless, wooden dolls. All such things happen because of the mismanagement of our women. This is what the adage means: 'The Mother's secret is revealed in her child'. Again, it is not for nothing that our elders coined the saying, 'If the mother is good, the child is good. If the courtyard is flat and clean, the rice too will be good and clean!' We buy expensive sarees paying hundred or two hundred *varahas*, wear them once in three or six months, soak them with our smelly sweat, and fold them back into our boxes. Is there anything dirtier than taking them out wearing them again? We have seen bundles of such expensive sarees, drenched in sweat, mites drawn to them and rotting. Our *shāstras* have prescribed ritually clean clothes for us. We should not be wearing sweaty, smelly clothes when we eat. Ritually clean clothes means that we should wash sweaty, smelly clothes before we wear them. But we think that our silk sarees are eternally clean if they remain unwashed. What is the meaning of all this?"

The Surualu Queen: "They say 'true words brook no reply!'"

When she said this, the god's ceremonial procession began.

She continued, "Now let us watch the procession! I don't feel like stopping my conversation with you."

Saying this, the Suralu Queen started chewing betel leaves and nuts.

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7.

Tale of the Seventh Month

In the Puttige Somanatha temple there is a copper plate inscription belonging to king Vijayabhyudaya, and of the Hindu year Krodhi, of the first half of the month of Chaitra, dated fifteenth Friday, in the Saka year, 1346. According to its prescription, the priest's assistant, Iswara, brought in a plate white rice, coconut, betel leaves and nuts, plaintains, jaggery, silver coins, and a lamp lit, did an *ashṭamangala* before he began to beat the drum. Then the priest performed the ritual worship of the God's seat before the ceremonial procession of the deity began. The *Tantri* moved ahead, under the shade of the palm-leaf parasol held over his head, holding a long-handled vessel of holy water. The wielder of the fire-torch marched on either side of the procession. The *Tantri* performed the ritual of worshipping the invisible guardians of the eight corners of the world. In the second round of the procession he performed the worship of the primordial Mother Goddesses or Seven Mothers, as also paying the ritual obeisance to Jupiter, Ganapati and Chandeshwara. Then the procession moved to the outer yard of the temple. There the priest-assistant, the *Tantri's* helper and the wielder of fire-torches moved ahead while the

drummer got busy beating his drum. The *Tantri* and his assistants performed the worships at a number of little ritual sacrificial stones at the outer yard and moved in to the base of the temple flag-post. The priest who was holding the icon of the God also reached there. There another round of God's procession tool place to the accompaniment of fire-torches, pipes and drums. Then the sentinels of the eight corners of the world were again propitiated with God as witness. In the next round all the tutelary deities of the temple and chief guardian of the temple were also paid their due obeisance. The heads of the guttus, with all their insignias and claims of eminence, too joined the procession. In the fourth round a naga procession was enacted, to the accompaniment of noisy and grating drums of various kinds, pipes and drones, hand-bells and so on. Another round of procession was to the accompaniment of *eeraṇa* or a little folk drum. The sixth round was accompanied by all types of drums and pipes. By this time people began to stream into the temple. The *chenḍe*[1] beaters now began to tighten the ropes of the surface- hide of the instrument and got the instrument ready before beating it with aplomb. The procession to the accompaniment of this instrument drew greater enthusiasts from far and near because of its ringing sound. At that time the *bhūta* impersonators in their traditional costumes, make up and accoutrements came to the presence of the God-in-procession and performed their patented act of shaking and trembling. Then the champion *chenḍe* players excelled themselves in producing great, rhythmic sound and the players of other drums like *nagāri, diḍmbu, tāḷa,* and *dōlu* and wind instruments like *kombu* and *bānki* did everything to outclass them, and they together accompanied the God in the next round of procession.

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[1] *Chenḍe* is a cylindrical drum beaten with two sticks. It produces stentorian, ringing sound. It is popularly used in *yakshagāna* and in temple processions. Kerala is home to some of the expert players of this instrument.

Many young men and urchins too joined the procession, getting busy with teasing others and exchanging ribald jokes. The young men of Polali got busy with staring at every girl and young woman they saw and inspecting them from head to toe, flinging rude or dirty comments at them, winking or making passes at them while accompanying the God's holy procession. As the God's procession reached a stage when his enacted presence reached a crescendo, the rows of flambeau glowed. That dazzling light made sure that the all the palace women seated in rows of gallery, balcony appeared to glow more than in normal sunlight. The young men who watched them forgot to watch God's procession! When one was pointing out to another this girl or that woman, they all were drawn to a young woman who sat in the main balcony. She was like gold decorated; she glowed brighter than silver; she was shining brighter than sun and seemed to soothe the eyes better than moon. As she was wearing a rose-coloured silk saree, her beauty got highlighted more than others'. Our Narayana Bhatta and Ranga Bhatta from Polali stood dazed and transfixed at her sight. At that time more and more flambeaux were lit. Either because he was dazzled by the light or sight or because he hadn't slept at all on the previous night, our Narayana Bhatta swooned and fell on the temple yard!

When Narayana Bhatta collapsed, his friends, Ranga Bhatta, Somappa and others lifted him up and carried him to the room where the priests are accommodated and made him lie down. A crowd assembled there and people kept making inquiries as to what happened. By this time Narayana Bhatta opened his eyes and recovering his senses, assured them that all was well and asked for something to assuage his thirst. Some people rushed to bring him water, lemon and sugar and such other things. Sankraya Achary was busy fanning his friend with plaited palm leaves. Then Somappa Moily said to Ranga Bhatta that they should all make a collective prayer to the Gods and deities, which they did: "O, Gods! Whatever

wrongs we might have committed, the Ullalthi of Polali and Lord Somanatha of Puttige should pardon us. Tomorrow morning we will arrange for a special *Kārthika Pooja* here. Reaching Polali, and before we drink a drop of water there, we will offer a roll of jasmine flowers to the deity Ullalthi. If there are any more unredeemed sins we carry, we will ritually consult the priests and do the necessary expiations!" Saying this, they kept aside half a rupee as a fee of the expiation. People then dispersed.

Narayana Bhatta opened his eyes and started blinking. He saw that only Sankraya Achary was by his side. He said to Achary:

"By the way, Sankraya Achary, you should now go the temple yard and find out who that lady in rose-coloured silk saree, seated in the temple balcony, is. Go immediately after the people return with drinks for me."

Saying this Narayana Bhatta closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep. Soon, people returned, made for him lemon *sherbet* and nursed him back to his recovery.

By then Sankraya Achary was quick to reach the temple yard. All the rounds of God's procession except the last one, to the tune of all drums and pipes, were over. Accompanying the procession were Subraya Achary and some of his friends from Moodabidre, conversing with each other. Subraya Achary saw Sankraya Achary and asked him,

"Oh, Who is this? Yes! Someone who is seen once in a blue moon! Is this not Sankraya Achary of Polali? When did you come? Who are all with you? Are your women too with you?"

Sankraya Achary: "No! Why should women accompany me? We are altogether about thirty."

Subraya Achary: "Are there any whom I am likely to know?"

Sankraya Achary: "Perhaps not. From Polali a number of Brahmins have come with us, and other young men also have come with me."

Subraya Achary: "That's fine! But why didn't you come to my house? Is it to proclaim your importance? Or is it because you fear that it may result in us visiting you in turn? Are we not related to each other? It appears that your father and my mother's uncle worked together in Moose Keeyi. You do not know me, but I know you."

Sankraya Achary: "Not like that, I say! Whatever you may think, we set out after the worship and ritual procession of the Goddess, and after we ate our evening meals there. Why should you get upset over it? We are meant to visit each other regularly. By the way, who is this? Is he the son of that man from Karkala? How is your father? Who are all here with you? Is Sesamma keeping good health?"

Lingappa: "My father is somewhat fine. He has a stomach-ache. It defies cure. Mother is as fine as she can be."

Sankraya Achary: "If he does not give up smoking marijuana, his stomach-ache will not be cured. But who is this? I seem to have seen him."

Lingappa: "He is the son of the man from Nandolige. His name is Dyanappa. Haven't you known his father? He is famous for making golden nose-studs! He is the son of Nandolige Malinga!"

Sankraya Achary: "Damn it! So, you are Malinga's son! I have known him well. But who is that man?"

Lingappa: "This is the son of the man from Elluru. The other person is the eldest son of Chandraya from Derlayi. His sister is given in marriage to Janna, the younger brother of the man from Mijar. How is your father, by the way?"

Sankraya Achary: "My father's days passed well. He passed away more than fifty years ago, you know! By the way, Subraya Achary, you seem be knowing everybody here, don't you? Who is that lady in rose-coloured silk saree? Look, that lady, seated there on the right among the four women!"

Then Subraya Achary sheltered his eyes and saw intently in that direction and said:

"On the balcony, isn't it? That is the niece of our Chouta king? Don't you know her? Siridevi! In fact I made the cestus with jingling bells for her. The cestus has two *seers* and twelve grains of gold and the bells have five *seers* and ten grains of gold. They had allowed wastage of fifteen grains of gold. The gold was of the purest quality, malleable as wax! If you melt it now, its purity will be proclaimed by its eight colours! They were planning her marriage this year, in fact. But since they got busy with the work of the temple, they have put it off, for the time being."

Then Subraya Achary continued, "Look, brother Sankraya, will you come for a particular work for a period of two months after the *ashṭami* festival? The King seems to plan many new designs of ornaments made. If he happens to see you, he will not let you go. Now, promise me, you are surely coming!"

Sankraya Achary: "I can certainly come! After all, you are there for me. If you invite me, what is my problem in going anywhere? By the way, tell me. How many nieces does our King have?"

Subraya: "Where are many? She is the only one! She is more than a boy and more than a girl! She is verily a golden ear of corn! She wouldn't utter a word unworthy of her. She is still schooling and learning. She is very intelligent and competent. Any scholar or expert in scriptures visiting the place cannot challenge her in their own fields of expertise. She is not married yet because she could not find a boy to match her. In her room in the first floor of the palace she has a whole stack full of palm-leaf records. There you can see! Behind her is her aunt, the queen of the realm. Behind her is the daughter of the Karkala king. On the left is Gummakka. Her husband is no more. I do not know much about others."

Sankraya: "Now where are you heading to? Our people are scattered here and there. I will leave you now to meet our people. I will meet you later."

Subraya: "Sankraya brother! Even if I do not meet you in the

morning, be sure to visit me at my house and drink a pot full of water before you leave. If you don't come, I may not see your face again. I will vow to be resentful of you. Tell me. Do you agree?"

Sankraya: "Yes, I will surely come. But we are far too many people. Why should we trouble you?"

Subraya: "What trouble? I have enough of what God has given me. What if there are so many? You may at least partake of betel leaves and nuts. On my oath, you shall come! If you fail, bad things will befall me! What do you say?"

Sankraya: "Yes, I promise, I will be there!"

Saying this he left the place.

By that time the ceremonial rounds of procession of God were over. The *Tantri* got ready to lead the 'tremor- procession' of God as the sequel. All the kings and chiefs who had gathered there were offered their ritual honours. The God in procession then headed to the Vasantha Mantapa, where he received sixteen varieties of worship. God was seated on the golden palanquin, and thereafter the procession returned to the temple yard to the accompaniment of devotional songs. The eleventh round of procession was with the enchanting temple-dancers and the twelfth to the accompaniment of the wind-instrument of *Mauri*. The thirteenth one was with the orchestrated sounds of all pipes and drums; the fourteenth and the fifteenth were 'running processions' in which everyone, God included, ran. Thereafter the God-carrier entered the inner yard of the temple, where a coconut was ritually broken to announce the happy conclusion of the festival and finally the God was reinstalled on the pedestal and a formal worship was offered.

After the ritual was concluded, people began to disperse. Some of them, of course, did not stir out. They sat in some corner and dozed off. Some were leaning against each other, both battling out the besieging sleep. By this time the eastern sky was getting brighter. People then got up and began to disperse in all directions, as crows

would when threatened by bowmen. Some of them bought broiled rice, plantains, jaggery, ground-nuts, concentric rings of fried savouries, sweet potatoes and all sorts of eatables, and settled down to eat them. Some women were sullenly cursing their husbands for not buying for them what they had demanded. After the buying spree and after spending whatever money they had carried, they even bought things on loan, and finally wended their ways to their respective homes, blinking their eyes out of enveloping sleep.

When everyone was leaving the scene of the temple festival, the young men of Polali too left after washing their faces and treating their bellies for the complaining hunger. When everyone was returning in a happy, triumphant, boisterous mood, Narayana Bhatta alone marched silently, looking only at the path to tread, without talking to anyone in his company, before he reached Polali. He reached late in the morning, long after the time when he could have eaten the water-soaked rice of the previous night. They remembered to redeem the vow they had made to offer two bundles of jasmine flowers to the Polali temple and went to their respective homes. Sankraya Achary went to Narayana Bhatta's house, where he narrated to his friend all about that girl before he went home. Narayana Bhatta listened to what he had to say and immediately spread a mat and lay down.

Narayana Bhatta who lay down in his house after his return stayed there till night, without taking bath or eating his meals. His worried mother would often go to him and try to wake him up. But our Bhatta would not respond, however much he was awakened and in whatever way he was awakened. When it was really dark, Achary came home to meet him. He called him out, "What, Bhatta Sir? Haven't you got up yet?"

Then Bhatta sat up, opened his eyes, looked at his friend and broke into tears. When his mother saw this, she felt as if she lost her senses. She cried and asked Sankraya Achary as to what had happened to her dear son. Then Achary replied: "Dear Madam! Yesterday

night he had swooned and fallen down because of sleeplessness. We had lifted him up, gave him lemon juice and brought him here. Tomorrow he will surely recover. You don't worry!"

Hearing this, mother felt as if someone had banged her head with a heavy stone. She immediately called her servant boy and sent for the temple priest. The priest came there forthwith. He sat beside Narayana Bhatta and tried to wake him up. Narayana Bhatta opened his eyes, looked at the inquiring priest and closed his eyes again. The priest assured the patient's mother not to worry. He said some evil eye must have ensnared Narayana, and to overcome it, he brought some holy ash, whispered some incantations into it and sprinkled it on him. He took out a coin and waved it around Narayana's head, saying, "Whatever the evil affecting him, we will find it out in a ritual inquiry and we will see to it that the solutions are found." Saying this, he set aside the coin in the name of god.

"I will come back tomorrow morning. It is important to look at his horoscope. I will be here when I go to the temple for the daily worship" said the priest, and lifted the horizontal Narayana Bhatta, made him to brush his teeth and wash his face before feeding him.

By next morning news spread that Narayana Bhatta was ill. Hearing the news people in the village, the rich and poor, the young and old, men and women, began to stream into his house, either to watch his ailment or condole it. The number of people going to his house was so huge that one could as well mistaken them going to some village fair!

By this time the priest of the temple came there as promised. He asked for the horoscope of Narayana and scrutinised it closely. He drew the ritual design in white earth. He made some abstruse calculations and said, "In the direction of Moon and in the square of Mars, I see some evil staring at him. To overcome it, you should make a golden replica of serpent and worship it for forty-eight days. Thereafter, twelve virgins and twelve young boys should be given

due gifts and fed. That should solve the problem. But there is no danger to Narayana's life. This problem which is staring at Narayana will continue to trouble him for the next three months and twelve days. But there is no reason to fear!"

Then Sankraya Achary asked the priest, "Sir, Where can we hold the ritual inquiry? Then the priest said,

"What is there in the ritual inquiry? It is all hogwash! Sometimes, one out of ten may come true. Anyway, go to the consulting priest of Poovaru. He may tell you what he thinks is true. Go to him."

Thus he sent Ranga Bhatta and Sankraya Achary to Poovaru. They reached there. They had drinks to quench their thirst and recover from the fatigue of travel and ate the mandatory betel leaves and nuts. Then they said, "We want a ritual inquiry to be held. Open your chart and cowries." The consulting priest of Poovaru did so. They first placed a silver coin on the chart. The sign of zodiac on which the coin was placed was subjected to some calculations and the soothsayer started saying this:

"This does not show any sign of ailment either to quadrupeds or to human bipeds. This has nothing to do with theft, lies, or something missing. But this seems to be connected with some problem connected with a person. The man who is facing this problem has no problem of illness or any such things. He seems to be afflicted with some mental worries. In all the signs of zodiac in his horoscope, I see strong blessings of God. But since Saturn is in his active mode, he may be troublesome for a few days. But the person will get over these troubles and recover soon. You do not have to overly fear in this regard." After pronouncing his diagnosis and judgement, the consulting priest closed his chart and set aside his cowries.

But this ritual inquiry did not quite convince Sankraya Achary. He had heard that in the Manela town there was one Kanna Balyaya from the southern provinces. He along with Ranga Bhatta went to him wanted another ritual inquiry to be conducted by him. Balyaya

unpacked the cowries' bag and cast his chart. He again set about calculating the signs of zodiac after they placed the silver coin on the chart. He then said:[2]

"This seems to be connected with some real danger. One person is in real danger. It appears to be somewhat serious. It appears to emanate from a red-coloured deity. If you don't find the right solution to the problem, this may lead to mental derangement. The fellow is not in his senses now. His life spirit is ebbing away. And it is getting aggravated every day. This afflicted person has, a few days back, gone to a festival outside his village. There he was afflicted by a female evil spirit. Added to her blight, I see the evil scowl of the Great Guliga. Besides, the local deities also seem to be sullen in their moods. This fellow seems to be in great fright. These deities demand blood sacrifices. Only if these sacrifices are arranged right, he may be cured of the fear tenanting his mind."

Then Sankraya Achary and Ranga Bhatta asked the astrologer, "Who can conduct that sacrifice? We have some person in mind. Tell me if that is right. Spread the chart and find out!"

Thus they made the astrologer conduct the ritual inquiries twice. They asked him which one would suit them best. Then the Malayali Balyaya said,

"The first one is not very good. The second one seems to be fine. If the wizard you have in mind does the sacrifices that would do. You have the benediction of gods, for sure. All will be well."

Hearing this, Achary and Ranga Bhatta began to tell each other. "That priest from Poovaru does not know anything about ritual inquiries. This Balyaya is really good!" They complimented the Malayali soothsayer and returned.

As they were getting back they remembered that there was a

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[2] The words of this Balyaya from the southern province are in broken Malayalam, since this genius of an astrologer is from Kerala.

person from the Nalke caste at the Kariya ferry who was quite a well-known soothsayer. They went to him and asked him too as to what the problem with their friend was. The Nalke man said, "Look lords! Here is a case of a blight of a red-coloured spirit affecting your friend. The deities, Panjurli and Kallurti, would be demanding the ritual propitiation. Besides, Jumadi too is unhappy, my lords, and Jumadi may also demand propitiation. If you propitiate and please the deities of the locality, all will be well. You set aside a coin of promise today only, my lords! All will be well."

Having heard all these, the two friends returned to Narayana Bhatta's house and narrated everything to Enkamma, the mother of the ailing Bhatta.

Enkamma asked them, "Who is going to do the exorcism? And when?"

Achary said, "Tuesday seems most propitious. The name of Mainda Moily was recommended by Balyaya."

Enkamma: "Yes! We will chase away the blight that day! Let us go to Mainda this evening to invite him here."

Saying this, Enkamma readied nine varieties of grains, waved them round the head of her sick son to siphon out the blight, as it were, and kept them aside for the ritual. She then commissioned the priest to perform the *pooja* and gave away the necessary provisions. But Narayana Bhatta didn't do anything except grunt or moan monosyllables. If he was asked anything in particular, he would stare blankly, behave like a deaf log, close his eyes and lie down again. If really insisted upon, he would eat a morsel of food or two. Otherwise, he wouldn't even do that. Day by day, he was drying up. Then one day Puttanna Bhat of the *Mutt* came there. He held the patient's pulse and learnt the secret of his illness. He then said, "This is the problem of bile. This needs an application of herbal medicinal paste on the crown of his head. He also needs to be fed with medicinal rice gruel. He should also need a medicinal oil to massage his body

with. I will prepare them for you. That will cost two and a half rupees." He took that money and left.

Not long after, Mainda Moily, the exorcist arrived. He woke up Narayana Bhatta, opened his eyes, scrutinised them closely and announced his verdict:

"There is nothing more to this than the malediction of Ravu-Guliga. It is like blight on him. Nothing serious will happen to him. After performing the sacrifices and giving away the coin and the grains to absorb his blight, he should recover soon."

Thus he did everything to instil confidence in the patient and those in charge of him. Then Narna Bhatta asked him, "What are all needed to have the blight chased away?"

Mainda said, "We don't need many things; just a few: Five *seers* of charcoal powder, five *seers* of white earth, one *seer* turmeric powder, one hundred and fifty little stick-flambeaux, fifteen coconuts, fifteen tender coconuts, twenty-eight *seers* of broiled rice, two *seers* of beaten rice, two *seers* of jaggery, bundles of dry branches and twigs of red wood fig tree, banyan tree, peepul tree, jack fruit tree, willow fig tree, a pot-full of vermilion water, one tender branch of a coconut tree, fifty plantains, thick, roasted *rotis* made of five *seers* of rice, cooked rice of five *seers,* about seven and a half litres of toddy, one sturdy white cock, one young hen, a little more than a litre of coconut oil, about half a litre of ghee, quarter of a litre of milk, a hundred and fifty top parts of plantain leaves, one full bottle of arrack, fifteen packets of incense, some frankincense and camphor, one plantain trunk, some red ixora flowers, and a few other varieties of flowers, some rags and some coins to be placed along with the offerings. Get these things ready. The rest of the things I will manage." Saying this, Mainda Moily left the place, busily chewing betel leaves and nuts.

Enkamma was sad and was not able to ingest what little she ate. She would not get sleep either. Going hungry, and crying inconsolably, the poor old woman was getting visibly emaciated.

She could hardly walk. Poor, old woman! What can she do all alone? People who saw her began to say that if things remained the way they were now, she wouldn't last too long either. But she was doing everything which was prescribed and whoever prescribed it. It was just her fate! It was as the adage goes, 'when his fate was bad, poor Uggachari ran into them.' Anyone who visited Enkamma wouldn't miss an opportunity to console her.

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8.

Tale of the Eighth Month

Today is Tuesday. Today is the day of exorcism for Narayana Bhatta. Preparations for it were on, and many were engaged in it. In the afternoon the chief exorcist, Mainda Moily arrived and had the front yard cleaned by getting it washed with cow-dung. He got the symbols of sacrificial altar ready with specific designs of coconut leaves made and fixed to slices of plantain trunks. The altars with three, four, five and six corners were readied. He drew a large ritual design on floor using red, yellow, white and black powder. In it figured a large picture of fierce *daiva*, *Guḷiga.* On all the corners of the ritual design so drawn he placed plantain leaves on which he served items of oblation like rice, coconuts, betel leaves and nuts, plantains, flowers, areca flowers, tender coconuts, jaggery, beaten rice, etc. In the middle of the design he placed a *kalasha* or sacred water in a metal pot, on the mouth of which he kept a coconut surrounded by jack fruit leaves. He placed offerings of cooked rice at various places, planting into them stick-flambeaux, along with tender coconuts. He then separately offered an oblation of cooked rice on which he poured red vermilion water and shaped it into a rough cone. After the worship and

rituals were conducted, the Brahmin priests too gathered there. Thereafter, at the top-end plantain leaves oblations of broiled rice, rice, coconuts, etc. were served. The wooden sticks and faggots were arranged for a fire-sacrifice and Mainda Moily broke into abstruse incantations.

By this time the ailing Narayana Bhatta was brought there and was made to sit, with somebody supporting him firmly. The exorcist held a fistful of rice, placing it on Bhatta's head, rattled his incantations and waving it around his head seven times to take away the evil, put that rice into the vermilion water. The coins that were vowed and kept aside too were waved round Bhatta's head and put into the vermilion water. All the stick-flambeaux were burnt, and thereafter, the exorcist held a fistful of broiled rice, and started blowing massive incantations into it: "*Omu! Khaḍga Raamannaya! Sarva Peeḍa dahanayaa...Omu! Kāḷarathri Suvaa...*" He shouted this incantation, as if to assail the ears of all, one hundred and eight times, and he circled his fist with broiled rice round the head of Bhatta before he put them in the vermilion water. He them muttered some more *mantras* in low voice, touched another fistful of broiled rice to different parts of Bhatta's anatomy and put it into the vermilion water. Mainda got up and said in loud voice, "*Om! Namo Bhagavate Kāḷi... Mahākāḷi...! Bhadra Kāḷi... Trishula Mohineem... Dushtagriha Nivārineem... Shatswāha..!* He said this forty-eight times and splashed the vermilion down on the burning stick-flambeaux and burnt the broiled rice. He then lit a big flambeau on a big stick, and as he was exploring the vermilion water he broke into another round of loud incantation: "*Omu! Rudrākshi daricchunu... Varaayira mukham... Randaayira baahukkulum... Moovaayira kannulum... Eḍatha kailu chootam pandanam...valatha kailu vekkanam shoolam...! Angane Irikkin! Ghanta karnande peeru keetu! Kaaliyum dooliyum! Naranmaar peedichu.. Poogavoogaa... Swahaa*!" Saying this twelve times, he splashed

the vermilion water on the burning fire. People gathered there stood up with a start. He had a tender coconut waved around the head of Bhatta, and had the cock and hen waved around the head of the ailing Bhatta, before collecting the things offered as oblations in a big new basket. He asked the Bhatta to stand up, in whose hand he placed a fistful of rice and said, "You wave this around your head and throw it in the fire, and go inside the house." Mainda then left the scene, carrying all the offerings which the *daivas* were given as oblations.

Narayana Bhatta went inside the house, ate his meal and duly went to sleep. That night Enkamma too had a good sleep. Everybody was sure that exorcism would work and Bhatta would recover. But that did not happen! Bhatta's mysterious ailment kept aggravating and the patient began to emaciate progressively, day by day. His limbs grew spindly. Eyes sank into their cavernous sockets. He grew so weak that he was not evn able to walk around. On the one hand the Brahmin priests were performing worships and rituals, sending up prayers on his behalf; on the other hand, apothecaries were busy treating him. Besides, the *daivas* around were given their due propitiation with *kōla, bali* and *agēlu.* But in spite of these efforts, Bhatta's problem seemed to aggravate day by day. Now it was more than a month since the Brahmin priests were trying to cure Bhatta's ailing body and mind; but nothing seemed to work favourably for the patient.

Then one day Sankraya Achary came to meet Bhatta, and called him. Bhatta opened his eyes and blinked blankly and abjectly. He held his friend's hand and said,

"I may not survive this trial. I have no particular illness, but I am sure to die. However, I want to tell you something." Saying this Bhatta wept inconsolably.

Then Sankraya Achary said, "Why do you cry? You tell me what is gnawing you." Saying this he wiped Bhatta's cascading tears. He insisted on knowing what secret Bhatta was hiding.

Bhatta said, "The moment I saw the king's niece at the balcony of the Puttige temple, I lost mind, and I surrendered it to her. Thereafter I feel as if her beautiful form appears before my mind's eye whenever I sit or stand, eat or sleep. When I sleep, I continuously dream about her throughout the night. Even if I close my eyes, I feel as if she is in front of me and talking to me. If I die without ever speaking a word to her, I will never ever hope to attain heaven. I may not survive the misery I am undergoing." Saying this Bhatta wept profusely and collapsed to his accustomed horizontality! After a while, he wiped his tears and told his friend, "O, Sankraya Achary! Please give up any hope regarding me. We lived for sometime like children of the same mother; from henceforth be cautious about things. People here speak one thing to you and say another thing about you from behind. You can trust none!"

Then Sankraya Achary said, "What kind of talk is this? There are plenty of girls, as beautiful as she, in our village. If they wear a fine saree and blouse, put on fine jewellery, they may even look much more beautiful than Siridevi. You just divest yourself of this infatuation for her. A learned man like you is whimpering like a child! Aren't you ashamed? Tell me what is so wonderful in a girl? Remember what happened to Indra or Chandra who fell for women? Pining for women in vain, many had lost everything they had. Were they not reduced to beggary? You were lecturing me endlessly on scriptures and ancient mythologies. What are you saying or doing now? You know the saying, "You invoke scriptures and yet wield the fishing rod". It appears this adage is coined, keeping you only in mind! Oh, God! What shall I say about your demented mind? Just see, dear Bhatta sir! Tell me, what should happen to us when many young men of the rich aristocratic family had thrown away their land and properties and abandoned their wives and families as precious and beautiful as golden ears of corn, and run after fallen Turkish or Beary women, living with them and rearing their children, eating or

drinking with them, accompanying them to fairs and festivals, and getting derided or slandered by all and sundry? These men, who should have lived like lords, are living like louts because of these women, aren't they? You are good at teasing others about their ways; but aren't you doing the same thing which you are so good at condemning? Look at what women can do! Don't you know the saying that 'a poor man can truly be comfortable in the company of the poor, while his desire for s rich girl will be verily his funeral pyre' and understand its meaning? Our ancestors have said and our *sastras* have prescribed that men should never ever trust womenfolk! They get the name of *naari* because they are verily *maaris* to the world.[1] She gets the name of *viliya* because she destroys the mental frame of all. Since she is capable of making people play and frolic in sin, she is called *ramaṇi.* Since she gives momentary pleasure, she is called *yōsha*; as she is the killer of all, she is known as *kumāri.* Since she is the embodiment of mighty anger, she is called *bhāmini.* Since she is known to be the fount of all injustices she is called *stree.* As she is reputed to domesticate all people, she gets the name of *pramada.* Since is capable of destroying the youth of people, she is known by the name *yuvati.* As she is the root of all desires, she is called *kaamini.* Since she saps the strength of all, she has the name of *abale.* Such etymologies are listed in Jaina *purāṇas.* When you know that there is an adage, 'Those who trust a woman will surely kiss the dust', why should you be mad after her? Your case is like, 'An old buffalo hankering for the green grass on the slippery slope!' What is the status of the king's niece, and what is yours? Even the *tāḷa-maddaḷe* sessions highlight the fact that supremely valiant

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[1] *Naari* is woman, and *Maari* is a fierce goddess, said to curse the people with blights like smallpox, if angry and un-propitiated. There is a popular saying: " *Hennu olidare naari, munidare maari*" meaning , a woman, when pleased, is *naari*; but she becomes a *maari* when angry. The Goddess Durga too has two such forms, benign and fierce.

men like Vali and Ravana were ruined because of their infatuation for women. When that is so, give up your obsession for that lady. Look for a fine girl and marry her."

To this long homily Bhatta said,

"I have not asked you to recite *shāstras* and *purāṇas*. I am not likely to live long. I thought I would tell you the secret of life and suffering before I breathe my last." Saying this, he turned his face to the wall and lay down.

Then Sankraya Achary said,

"If you are not likely to live, I will see to it that you do! If I arrange that you go to her room in the upper storey of the palace, are you likely to live? Tell me."

Then Bhatta seemed to revive a little and said, "If you can do that, the rest I will manage! If you can help me to reach her, I will certainly survive. I beseech you. I am willing to touch your feet. Please do me this one favour. If you do it, I will be like a servile servant to you till the end of my life!" Saying this, he came forward to touch the feet of Achary. Then, Achary stopped him, made him sit and said,

"My father used to construct for the royal princes, mechanical flying horses made of wood. During those days, as an apprentice, I too had started making a wooden fly-eagle and left it halfway. I can complete that for your sake. You can sit on it and fly around wherever you wish to. I will also teach you how to fly it. But it will take at least three months to complete my work."

Hearing this, Bhatta sat up, revived. He patted Achary's back and said,

"You are indeed like my elder brother! Now, take it from me, I will die no more! If you make for me that flying contrivance, you will surely get the religious merit of having saved my life! But tell me, are you bluffing me? Are you truthful? Don't lie to me! Do not deceive me ever!"

Hearing Bhatta, Achary replied,

"Haven't you seen those pieces of wood packed in the gunny bags in the carpenter's shed? They all are parts of that unfinished project. I will resume its work today only!"

As Achary helped himself to betel leaves and nuts and was getting ready to leave, Enkamma came there and said,

"Look, Achary, my son Bhatta does not show any sign of getting better. Tell me what I should do." Saying this she started crying.

Then Achary said, "Mother! Do not lose heart! Nothing bad is going to happen to him. From today onwards, he will start recovering his health and spirits. All the treatment he had undergone hitherto is like 'Gash on one side, and the ointment on another!' I have now performed a rite to ward off the blight that is preying on him. You can be sure he will recover in four days, and he will be up and moving." Assuring Enkamma thus, Achary left the place.

Reaching home, Achary took out all those pieces of wood and got busy with his work. He did all the structural works during day time while he performed all the delicate carvings during night. After four or five days, Bhatta had recovered enough to walk into Achary's shed and watch him work. From then onwards, Bhatta seemed to get over the blight he was afflicted with. He seemed to bloom every day, and soon became more handsome than he ever was!

The mechanical flying eagle which was in the making, was five and a half *kōlu* long and four and a half *kōlu* wide when opened;[2] when folded, it appeared like a box of half a *kōlu*. Even as Achary was making it, he was showing Bhatta how he should sit on it and fly. One full turn of its wheels, would guarantee a flight of twenty-four *haradāris!* But it cannot fly for seven nights and eight days, as could be done on the mechanical flying horse.

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[2] *kōlu* is a wooden measuring rod of two and a half feet. Tulu people conventionally used this measurement, and it has not altogether gone out of use.

On the night when its work was completed, this magician Achary did the work of commissioning it by chanting incantations and performing the ritual of *kutti pooja.*[3] But before the flying contrivance could be used, it would at least take ten days, before its lever gets loose and ready. Till then one could not fly any big distance. Till it got ready, Bhatta was being trained in the vicinity of his house.

Now Bhatta's happiness and high spirits knew no bounds. The flying contrivance was given a colour of reddish hue to resemble the eagle, and it was looking very impressive. Since he had to wait for ten days, he was becoming increasingly restless. When the waiting period was over, he took his bath in evening and finished his *pooja* by nightfall. He had his supper. He adorned himself with fine dress and jewellery. He sent up vows and promises of offerings to all gods and godlings and came to Achary's house. But since there was yet eight *ghaliges*[4] for moon to rise after sunset, and as the sky was particularly cloudy and dark, the two kept chatting and waiting for some time.

Then on the eastern sky the Moon God made his graceful appearance. Bhatta then opened the contrivance of flying eagle, and embraced Achary in great affection and gratitude and said,

"You are verily my elder brother! I have survived because of you! This life of mine, therefore, is yours! Now I will go and return soon."

Saying this, Bhatta sat on the mechanical fly-eagle. As he took off Narayana Bhatta looked resplendent, like God Narayana himself!

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[3] *Kutti Pooja* is a ritual performed by the carpenter while commissioning a house or ship, etc. to propitiate and ward off evil spirits believed to reside in the timber used therein. It involves sacrifice of fowl, although in the case of Brahmin houses vegetarian surrogate like ash- gourd, sliced and smeared with red vermilion to resemble meat is used. The carpenter is supposed to formally hand over the house he was instrumental in building.

[4] A *ghalige* is approximately twenty-four minutes.

As he was going, he was imagining the things he had to do and say there and kept rehearsing all the dialogues he was expecting to make. Soon he reached the upper storey of Kayaramanja palace. As he got down from his mechanical fly-eagle and stood on the palace floor, he felt that his hands and legs were shivering; his heartbeat grew loud like pounding the beaten rice. But still, he made bold and peeped into the window. He saw two ladies playing the board game of *chenne*. He started worrying as to what he should do. There are two out there, he thought: with only one, I could have managed my game of lies, falsehood and deceit, but with two, things will not be too easy. These days people believe in the threesome gods of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara, but people live with their families of parents and children. That is what is needed for the humans. But a man without family is an uncared-for vagabond. He cannot really live meaningfully. There are great books which tell us that truth alone is great. There is also an adage that your reward for truthfulness you get only when you die; but the reward for falsehood you get at anytime. In fact, those who have followed a virtuous and truthful path have only experienced difficulties in life. 'Truth is naked'; hence there is nothing in it. Let all the long-winding thoughts about truth be reserved for the old. In fact, it promises nothing. These days people live on lies, falsehood and deceit, and they invariably get the grace of god! As he was thinking thus, he could not anymore bear with the ringing hits of mosquitoes! What could he do? Fraudulence is not a new word or idea. It took birth along with Truth; it was reared by washer man and it grew up with the administrator. It prospered with the barber; it wandered from place to place and grew further with the expounders of *purāṇas*,. It migrated from one village to another; it followed the Brahmins and spread everywhere. Often it sneaked into the writings of poets; it allied itself with prostitutes; it cultivated friendship with young men; it smiled its associations with the traders and merchants; it hopped around in every town and village; it dazzled

in the work of goldsmiths. It has looked after the poor, embracing them dearly and protecting them at every turn. Is there a greater god than this fraudulence? Untruth is verily the greatest god for the poor. He cannot live trusting Truth. No one listens to any news seriously or attentively which is not duly mixed with untruth. If you have to get your work done, you should tell lies, play false and cheat people. If he cannot do these things, he cannot do anything. We should put on the guise as per the demands of the time and according to our compulsions.

As Bhatta was thinking and churning his thoughts thus, he heard a sound. He woke up from his reverie when the sound of the big drum announced that the night was sliding into dim dawn. The girls playing *chenne* ended the game. The maid servants went downstairs to lie down and rest. Siridevi changed her saree and opened the windows to let the breeze in. She prostrated before the gods and lay down in her bed.

Then Bhatta came near the window and peeped in. He saw a lady sleeping on a high cot, on soft bed covered with silk sheet, placing her head on an embroidered pillow, turning slightly to one side. On one side of the room sarees of many colours had been arranged neatly on a rope. On the shelves were bottles of perfumed oil, rows of books, jewel boxes, gold and silver plates and so on. There was a tall silver lamp giving out soft, kindly light. In front of the cot there was a life-size mirror. Around the cot, the festoon-like embellishments were lazily moving in the wafting breeze. There were also many icons of gods kept at different corners, proclaiming the craft of craftsmen. Only God knew for how long Bhatta kept standing and staring there.

And yet Bhatta recovered and sneaked into the room, like cat, through the open window and stood nervously by the side of the cot. But he started trembling where he stood and his breath turned into a heavy gasp. He quietly sat on the cot. Saying to himself he did

not now mind dying, he made bold to remove the veil of the saree from the girl's face! He gazed at the face as tender and pink as the mango shoot. He then softly touched her and woke her up. At the unexpected touch the girl got up with a start and, rubbing her eyes in shock and disbelief, shouted "Raama...Raamaa...!" Though Bhatta clasped her hand with soft firmness, she broke free and stood aside nervously. She trembled in fear and her throat went dry. And yet when she took a sword and brandished at the intruder, Bhatta felt as if his life ended right there. Thinking that his end was near, he said,

"For heaven's sake, great lady! Save my life. Please listen to what I say, and then wield your sword!"

Saying this, he threw a magic lemon to her knee and succeeded in changing her mind!

Hearing his words, she called out her the guards. But none woke up because they were all fast asleep. She again shouted, "Thief!... Thief!"

Then Bhatta, prostrated before her and said,

"Please save my life! I am not a thief! Do not hasten to any conclusion!"

Siri: "If you are not a thief, who else are you? At this time, in the darkness of midnight, who asked to come to the room of seventh storey of the palace where young girls live and rest? I will slice off your head, right now!"

Saying thus she lifted her hand, menacingly.

Bhatta: "Tarry a little! Wait for a while. I do not mind dying at your hands. First listen to what I say, and then decide what you should do."

He then slowly stood up and grinned.

When Siridevi saw him grinning, she was both startled and scared. What the hell is this, she thought, and said,

"Are you a ghost? A goblin? Or a human being? First, tell me that!"

Bhatta: "I am neither a ghost nor a goblin! I am a human being."

Siri: "If you are a human being, tell me why you are here. Tell me that, in the first place, and immediately!"

Bhatta: "For that why are all these noise and confusion? Sit down first, and I will explain everything leisurely. Do not be in a hurry. Listen to me!"

Siri: "How and wherefrom you have come here? Why did you come here? How did you come here?"

Bhatta: "Look, Siridevi! Aren't you able to recognise me? Don't you know who I am? Why this playacting? It's all right if you do not know me! I came to the seventh storey of the palace flying on eagle! If you do not know me, I will go away. You can sleep in peace. Do not get upset!"

Siri: [She said to herself: What is the matter here? I do not know any men. This guy says if I do not recognise him, he would go away immediately. He says he flew in on his eagle!] "Tell me, you lout! How should I recognise you? My uncle will teach you all about knowing women!"

Bhatta: "O, yes, yes! What you said of me as a thief is right! But now I do not carry that epithet. You may not now recognise me. If one is the niece of the king or the daughter of a ruler, and if she is rich and famous, they say, she is surely blind about recognizing people. That seems to be right in your case too. If it is the case with a girl like you, what should happen to lesser mortals? Sit down first. Listen to what I say, and then tell me what you want you to. If you had recognised me, you would not have raised a hue and cry, as you did. True!"

Siri: [Perplexed, she said to herself: What does he say? Let me listen to what he has to say.] "Now tell me! I am all ears!"

Bhatta: "You are a Jaina girl! Tell me how many Hindu *purāṇa*s are you acquainted with?"

Siri: [To herself: Mark! What is that to him? All right, I will tell

him!] "I have read and studied *Rāmāyaṇa, Bhāgavata, Mahābhārata, Dēvi Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāṇa, Siva Purāṇa* and many others. What is that to you?"

Bhatta: "If you so, you should be familiar with the story of *Bhāgavata*! Tell me whose story is that?"

Siri: "In *Bhāgavata* there are many stories. But mostly it consists of the stories of Krishna."

Bhatta: "Do you remember who Radha is in those stories?"

Siri: "Why not? Radha is the dear consort of Krishna. She is his most dearly loved one!"

Bhatta: [He said to himself: This girl is quite learned. But I will win over her merely in three shots of arrows!] "Leave that as it may! Have you read the stories about Sri Krishna and Radha disporting themselves on the banks of Yamuna River?"

Siri: "Yes, I have! I know something about them. Why is that important to you?

Bhatta: "That day, on the moonlit night, when the sweet fragrance of blooming flowers filled the air, and to the tune of humming bees, when the gurgling sound of flowing Yamuna was heard, Radha was sitting alone on the lonely stone by the side of the river, pining for Krishna, and crooning a song about him, Krishna came from behind and held her in tight embrace, she turned back and stood up to clasp him in turn, her hot, scalding tears started trickling into Krishna's body. Then Krishna said, 'What is this Radha! If on this night, and in this soft breeze of Vrindavana, in the cooling presence of Yamuna and in this benign moonlight when I am with you, you yet shed scalding tears, what does my presence mean to you? All that I do is in your honour and for your pleasure! There is nothing in this world which I desire more than you. If that should please you, I will sever my connections with my people Yadavas and brother, Balarama. What more shall I tell you? I can throw away my patent conch and weapon of discus for your sake. Tell me what do you want me to do?' Saying

this Krishna embraced his sweetheart and planted a kiss into her mouth. Then do you remember what Radha told him? If you don't, I will tell you! Radha said, 'Whatever you said may all be true. But when you have more than sixteen thousand one hundred and eight women whom you love as fondly and passionately, how can I trust your words?' Saying this, Radha turned her gaze at her own feet and stood there. Then Krishna said, 'My dear Radha! So, you don't trust me? What do you want me to do? I will do accordingly! On my oath to the Mother Earth!' Radha then embraced Krishna tightly, and with a satisfied smile said, 'You say you do everything for my sake and pleasure. All right! If that is true, this Radha and Krishna should again be reborn as humans, and we should get all the pleasures that a man and a woman are entitled to get. That is why we should be reborn as humans. This is my wish. Be sure that none else among your sweethearts should. Only the two of us should! This is my wish, and you should fulfil it.' Krishna replied, 'Oh! Just this! Is it so difficult? Forgetting all my thousands of wives, I will be born as a Brahmin in the Kali Age; you will be reborn as a princess of Tulunadu. I promise to come there *incognito* and stay with you!' Haven't you read these things in *Bhāgavata*?"

Siri: "No! I don't know about it! I have not read it!"

Bhatta; "Yes! I can understand that. When you are reborn in the Kali Age, you are distanced from the proximity of god, and your memory must have been erased! But mark! In that age, I was the Krishna who disported with Radha! You were the Radha who was with that Krishna! Now I am here, shorn of my past divinity, and accompanied only by my vehicle *garuḍa* to fulfil my promise to you! If you trust me, I will stay here; or else I will go away! I am not a thief or a cad." Saying this he held her hands and made her sit.

Siri then broke free from him, and darted out to another corner of the room. [She said to herself: What kind of story is this! If indeed I was the Radha of Vrindavana, who else could be greater than

she? Krishna was truly the incarnation of Adi Narayana. If this man were to be that Krishna, what more is needed? If not how could this Brahmin get this *garuḍa*? Whatever it is, I can decide only after consulting my uncle.]

Siri: "I don't trust all these prattle and tricks. That is because that Krishna was a blue-bodied person. He should have four patented possessions like conch, discus, mace and lotus flower. You don't have any of these. If you can show me that old form of yours, I can believe you!"

Bhatta: [He said to himself: This medicine of mine seems to be working on her! Let me try a little more!] "O Radha! You do not yet seem to understand! Such weapons as conch and discus were needed in those days to destroy numberless demons and to protect my Yadava people. Then, if my body colour is blue, won't people recognise me as god? I gave up all those divine powers as altogether unnecessary here. If you don't trust my words when it is concerned with your own happiness, how do we expect those who have read or heard *Vēdas, shāstras* and *purāṇas* to believe in god? See what the Kali Age can do to people!" [Saying this, Bhatta smiled and placed his finger on his nose to indicate his perplexity.]

Siri: [She thought for a while and said to herself that as a girl she could decide on nothing without consulting her uncle.] "May be what you say is right. But since I am a girl, I cannot say anything without consulting my uncle. You come tomorrow. I will tell you what I decide on this matter."

Bhatta: [He smiled to himself] "O my dear Radha! Are you so short of sense and wisdom? Who do you think your uncle is, or for that matter, your grandfather, your mother? What insane talk is this? When it is so ordained that this matter should be known to none else except the two of us, what are you talking about? If you do not like me or what I say, tell me straight to my face. I have my *garuḍa* ready here. I will go away. You go back to your sleep. Don't lose

sleep unnecessarily!" [Saying this, he got up and got ready to leave]

After all, Siridevi was a young girl, just fifteen years old. How could she spurn a god who was right there in her presence? Besides, she had come of age; the buoyancy of youth was on her. It was midnight too; there was none else around; it was a secret rendezvous. She was a royal princess; and more than anything else, here was a god-like presence more handsome than any prince could be. The man before her was a clever young man with winning ways; his words could win over the world. When things were so, it was no surprise that the girl was attracted to the 'god' in front of her! Right now she is a little handicapped with shyness. But the anger went into hiding. She then stood for a while, looking shyly at the floor. There was a visible tremor in her body. She started perspiring from head to toe. She could not decide what she should do or say. Then she decided to leave aside the shyness that was on her and said,

"I am a woman. If there is anything wrong in what I say, a wise man like you should pardon me. If you were truly Krishna and I your Radha, that is not in this life. If we now have to live as we had once lived, we should get married again as per the custom of the day. Without that a girl is not allowed even to see the face of a boy or talk to him"

Bhatta: "You are not an ignorant girl! There are eight types of marriage. Besides, according to the Naga-Berma custom prevalent in Tulunadu, a girl gets married only to a person who she likes and chooses. He alone settles down with her in her house. If you do not like me, I will go away. If you like me and choose me, we can live happily ever after, as we did in our previous lives."

Siri: "How can we be? Even if I like you or choose you, shouldn't my uncle know it? What can I do without him knowing what I do?"

Bhatta: "The *shāstras* prescribe a mode of marriage called *gandharva* marriage. It is simple. If the girl and the boy agree upon

it, the girl garlands the boy and the boy, in turn, garlands the girl. If that procedure is adhered to, that concludes the marriage. Haven't you read about it?"

Siri: "Yes, I know. But I also know that a king by name Dushyanta married Shakuntala thus and later started saying he did not know her at all! Poor thing! What all trials and tribulations she had to undergo! Is this going be another such experiment? No! No!"

Bhatta: "The marriage will be thus, for sure; but you and I will be never like them. If we find inconvenient here, we will just sit on my eagle and fly to the Milky Ocean! But then, we cannot do it in this human form. That is the only problem. Otherwise, why should we be obliged to anybody? We could have taken off right now!"

Siri: "It is all right. But if anything goes wrong, I may not stay alive!"

Bhatta: "If you keep this secret out of anybody else, I swear I will not betray you ever. Trust me."

Saying this, he took out the necklace of holy basil beads and was about to put it around her neck. But then he stopped suddenly and said, "No, no... You should garland me first... and not I"

Siri was convinced. She took her pearl necklace and put it around Bhatta's neck. Bhatta put the necklace of holy basil beads around her neck. He then advised her to chant his name a hundred eight times, both morning and evening.

Siri: "Am I condemned merely to chant your name?"

She said this with a smile.

Then her God embraced her and both of them sat on the cot. They brightened the dim lamp. They closed the windows. They then lay down and kept chatting merrily. The adage "A man can truly live well if he is glib of tongue!" has been well and truly demonstrated! See, by his glib, false talk and fraudulent ways Narayana Bhatta gained possession of the royal princess. In this Kali Age only falsehood is going to triumph! 'Nothing is more eloquent than

mendacity.' Name, fame, status and even royalty are all rooted in falsehood. Truth leads you nowhere! The adage that 'Truth is bare and falsehood is the hand-railing to success' truly holds good in this age. But as they say, the pleasures of falsehood will be a bed of thorns. Let not people forget that those who trust lies and fraud in life can find in Narayana Bhatta a true preceptor, and his life a good lesson. All right! Let us see what happens next.

* * *

9.

Tale of the Ninth Month

There was no dearth for the servants in the royal palace. As the adage goes, "If there is a heap of rice or paddy, would there be dearth of rats and bandicoots?" there were, in the palace, nearly a hundred and fifty servants, both men and women. Half of them were women, though. The king's niece alone had seven maid servants. They were exclusively meant for her service, and the king had ordered that none should order any service from them. Hence they had no other work to do except what was assigned to them by Siridevi. They were, therefore, solely preoccupied with chatting with her, pleasing her and retailing news to her the whole day. One could much rather talk to Siridevi than talk to these privileged maids of hers. Any talk with them which they considered a little freer than what they permitted, would mean that they would complain to the king. Therefore, none would talk to them or talk about them anywhere in the palace or outside.

One day Enkamma, Daaru, Lingamma and Subbu, ate their morning meal of rice gruel and went to the pond in the eastern flower garden to wash the clothes of Siridevi and other women of royalty. Since the garden was enclosed with a wall, they went in, closed the door

and locked it from inside. Then Daaru wore Siridevi's saree and blouse and said to Subbakka,

"Look, does this saree suit me? Tell me!"

Subbu: "Stop your coquetry! They say 'Those who have nothing seem to have a lot of conceit, even as small quantity of curry cooked tends to be very salty.' Your ways seem to confirm that adage! It is said the crow wanted to mimic a peacock and so tied peacock's feathers to its own tail and danced! But peacock is peacock and crow is crow! Enough of your stupid ways! Get on with washing the clothes!"

Enkamma: [Looking around] "Are there anybody else here?"

Lingamma: "Who else can be here? The Magrandaya deity of the palace?"

Enkamma: "Look Daaru! What is happening here? Do you know, Lingamma?"

Daaru: "What? Tell me Enkammakka!"

Enkamma: "What! It is the tale of a tawny cow grabbed by the tiger! What's happening in this Kali Age!"

Daaru: "What Enkammakka? Which tawny cow are you talking about?"

Enkamma: "Damn you! Which tawny cow? I am referring to the tawny cow of the palace itself!"

Daaru: "Who is that tawny cow of the palace you are talking about? Where has she been grabbed by tiger?"

Enkamma: "In your father's place, damn you!"

Daaru: "I don't understand your language! If you want to tell me, say it in simple, straight language!"

Enkamma: "To know the language you should first know the world! Your eyes do not see well!"

Daaru: "It is not that my eye sight is defective; you have really gone out of your mind! That is why you are saying incoherent things!"

Enkamma: "Have you been keenly observing our dear princess, Siridevi?"

Lingamma: "Damn your words! When have we stopped seeing our Siridevi?"

Enkamma: "No, I say! Damn you! You are such a stupid woman! Subbu! Have you been watching here?"

Daaru: "You say, yes and no! I make no sense of what she says! There is no end to her blabbering! You better wash your clothes. Let's us leave at the earliest."

Lingamma: "What is it, Enkammakka? You better tell me! These girls have drunk buffalo milk!"

Enkamma: "Let them drink buffalo milk or donkey's milk! You are only good at eating, dimwits! You may soon throw up what you have eaten! What is it to me? I am not a maid servant of Siridevi! You may end up being crushed under the elephant's feet!"

Daaru: "Perhaps she has had sun-stroke and her bile is up! That's why she talks like a demented woman. Why should we go near elephants? If anybody does, elephants may crush them. So what?"

Enkamma: "O, damned dullards! These dimwits will see sense only when they enter their graves! You may now speak pleasant, irresponsible things, and you will soon pay for it. It won't take too many days."

Hearing these words, Subbu, Daaru and Lingamma came near her and said in a low voice, "What is that news, Enkammakka? Tell us. We swear we will not divulge it to others. We swear in the name of our children and in the name of God!"

Enkamma: "You, seven of you, are always with Siridevi, aren't you? With her, like sentinel deities, day and night? You good-for-nothings! Have you seen her closely, anyone of you?"

Daaru: "What are you talking about? Who else has seen her? Have you?"

Enkamma: "Agreed! You alone have seen her! Who has noticed her belly, tell me!"

Subbu: "This Enkammakka seems to revel in talking nonsense! What has happened to her belly?"

Enkamma: "O, damn it! Why can't you die soon? It is better that each of you grab a piece of rope and hang yourself! Your eyes have all been seared and dried up.... Siridevi is pregnant...! She must be already five months or more! I saw her when she was taking her bath!"

When they heard these words, they all felt as if a huge stone fell on their heads. They froze into silence for a while.

Daaru: "Yes, Subbakka! It's true that her belly looks big! But I thought it was because she wearing a thick saree."

Enkamma: "Damn it! Have you seen her removing her blouse? The nipples and areola of her breasts too have grown black. Her belly is conspicuously big. If the king comes to know about it, I do not know what is going to happen!"

Lingamma: "This Enkammakka has gone senile! They say one is mad when one is seven and again when one is seventy! You seem to be afflicted by the madness of the seventies! You say any damn thing to anybody. You traduce our girl who is verily a godly child. Do you think everyone is as good at getting illegitimately pregnant as you are? Don't say such things. If you do, you are sure to eat dust! Don't say this to anybody else. If you do, they may chop off your head! Shut your mouth! Sridevi is verily the incarnation of Goddess Sridevi. She has not seen the face of any man till today. Besides, we the seven maid servants are always with her, day in and day out. If you say things which god's do not approve of, you may die with your rotten tongue assailed by maggots! You are such that you accuse anybody of anything! Enough of your slanderous drivel! Stop your nonsense and get lost!"

Enkamma: "Daaru! These morons know nothing. You go now and see her very closely. If what I say is false, tell me. They say even the Creator does not fathom the mind the women he had created. I

am not mad to slander someone and tarnish her name. But you don't ever eat like donkeys and lie down like cats with your eyes closed. At night keep an eye on her. You may discover the secrets of what had transpired."

Everybody endorsed her words and counsel. They washed the clothes, rinsed and wrung them and spread them to dry. They then bathed in the pond before getting back to the palace. But everyone was scared of what they heard from Enkamma.

Next day Daaru, Lingamma, Subbu, Neelu, Thirmala, Deeyi and Raamu got together and spoke in whispers and gestures. None of them found their food palatable. But they could not let out the secret. Everyone started keeping watch over her through the night till the dawn. But all their efforts at losing their sleep came to nothing. They found no clue whatever. These poor maids could find nothing about Siridevi's secret even after losing sleep for a month and a half. But Siridevi's belly was getting bigger and bigger!

Then Daaru said, "Now, come what may, tonight I will take my position under Siridevi's cot, without anybody else knowing it. If Siri enquires about me, you tell her that she had gone to meet her elder sister, asking Maire to be here in her place. Today let me find out all about the secret!"

The other maids of Siri concurred with this plan.

Accordingly, that day when Siridevi went in for her supper, Daaru went to Siri's room to arrange her bed. She swept the floor, spread the bed and tidied up everything. She then hid herself under the cot, squeezing herself behind a box.

Siridevi, as usual, ate her meals, chewed her betel leaves and nuts and went up to her room upstairs. There she sat down with Raamu for a game of *chenne*. Raamu lost the game just in three rounds. Her place was taken by Neelu. She lost in only two rounds. They then played the 'king's game' in *chenne*. Both of them lost in

three rounds.[1] Then Siri dismissively told them that they did not quite know how to play the game well and asked for Daaru instead. She said Daaru was a better player.

Then they said, "Daaru is not here today. In her place we have Maire."

Siri was a bit irritated and said, "Why that Maire? To eat dust, is she? Where has Daaru gone?"

One of the maids said, "It appears that her elder sister has come down from her husband's house. Daaru wanted to see her sister and her children and promised to return in the morning. She had come upstairs to take your permission, but it seems you were busy reading."

The Siri nodded her head and bade them to retire for the night.

Siri washed her hands and feet, changed her clothes, prostrated before gods and started reading a book. Her maids retired to their rooms for the night's sleep.

She read well past midnight and went to bed.

Shortly after, a booming noise was heard like a roar of the sea. Then a man pushed the widow open, entered the room and woke Siri up. Siridevi woke up and said, "Why are you late today? I was tired of waiting for you! Then I thought you would not come tonight, and hence went to sleep."

Bhatta: "Today we had obsequies to *Nāga* in our house. It was late when all the guests ate and went to bed. Hence the delay."

Siri: "Tell me, you say, obsequies to *Nāga*; but who actually died? What is he to you? Why didn't you tell me about it? How did he die?"

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[1] In the folk board game of *chenne*, there are many variants. The defeat therein is termed as 'becoming *pori*', variously meant to suggest 'getting burnt', 'going fallow', or 'getting married', and 'getting banished up the ghats', all indicating defeat and punishment. That marriage should figure as a punishment in the same way the others are is interesting. It is worth noting that *chenne*is a board game played by women!

Bhatta: "*Nāga* is serpent! If one sees the dead body of a serpent, he should first cremate it and perform all the rites of obsequies as would be done for a dead person."

Siri: "But why should obsequies is performed for a serpent? Do you do the same for viper and krait too? Does *Nāga* belong to your lineage?"

Bhatta: "All those who live in Tulunadu are the progeny of *Nāga*! That's why they are required to observe ritual pollution if the serpent dies. Hence they perform the obsequies."

Siri: "How do the Tuluvas become the progeny of the *Nāga* ?"

Bhatta: "This Tulunadu was earlier known as *Pātāla* or netherworld. This was the world of the *Nāgas*. The Tuluvas who live in Tulunadu look upon *Nāga* as their family deity. In fact, they used to be known as *Nāgas*. Even now when you address someone in Tulu as "*Indamaga*" and "*Indaga*",[2] the tone and meaning of "*Inda nāga*" get included in it. That is why performance of obsequies to *Nāga* is enjoined upon by the *Nāga Kaṭṭu* or *Nāga* custom."

Siri: "Tell me dear! This story of the *Nāga* is not found in any book I have seen. Please tell me all about it."

Bhatta: "You are right. If I should tell you the entire story of *Nāga* in all details, I need at least six months. But since you have asked me, I will give you sketches of it. Listen to me.

This land of the Tuluvas and Malayala was known from time immemorial as *Stree Rājya* and it is mentioned in the *purāṇas*. The reason is here the language, deity and the land of the people are considered as female! Since all these three are looked upon in feminine terms, it has got the name *Stree Rājya*. Here even today people adhere to *Marimakkattāya* custom of inheritance. *Mari* means serpent; *makka* implies children. Since *Nāga Kaṭṭu* is

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[2] In Tulu a boy generally and son particularly is addressed as "*Indamaga*", and a girl generally and daughter in particularly is addressed "*Indaga*".

prevalent here, it means that *Nāga* is both the god and the ruler of this place. This is verily the kingdom of the *Nāga* and his writ alone runs here.

Once upon a time the sea swallowed up the fortunes of the gods. In order to search and retrieve them gods and demons got together, and requested the *Nāga* king called Vasuki to churn and prise out the lost fortune. Vasuki put in great efforts and retrieved the fortunes of the gods. He was so fatigued after his labour that he lay down on the sea coast stretching to a length of 1200 *haradāri* and occupying the breadth of sixty *haradāri.* Neither the gods nor the demons bothered to wake him up to inquire into the status of his health or well-being. When he was gasping for breath and struggling to recover, his mother *Lekkesiri*, his two younger sisters, *Malesiri* and *Talasiri*, and their daughters came there and treated him, day and night, to restore him to his health. After he recovered and before he got back to his residence in the sea he said that from henceforth the forty daughters of *Malesiri* would head the province of *Malayāḷa rājya,* sixty daughters of *Talasiri* would rule the *Talanāḍu rājya* and all the administration in these kingdoms should be conducted in the name of his mother *Lekkesiri.* He said nothing should be done there without consulting his mother. He also decreed that from then onwards these two kingdoms should flourish as matriarchies. People should believe in and worship *Nāga*, *Berma, Lekkesiri* and the sentinel god, *Aburandāya* before they venture into anything. Here females inherit the property and they should stay to rule the kingdom. They were also ordered not to leave their kingdoms.

Vasuki then had the sixty daughters of *Talasiri* married to a boy named Ananta. He settled his mother *Lekkesiri* as their guardian. These sixty daughters are believed to have settled down in sixty sacred groves, lending the faithful devotees with gold and jewellery to hold their weddings and helping them generally in all matters. It is

said that if the devotees go to the grove in the evening and offer a coconut and a tumbler full of milk and offer salutation the daughters of *Lekkesiri,* the next morning they would give them a plateful of gold and jewellery. But they should be duly returned after the wedding! This has been going on even today. You will get them only in these sixty groves and in none else."

Siri: "By the way, which are those famed groves? Tell me the names!"

Bhatta: "What you demand is right. These sixty sacred groves in the vicinity of Ananthadi are: 1. Peraje 2.Mundaje 3. Sampaje 4 Panaje 5. Kammaje 6. Konaje 7. Pinkaje 8. Deraje 9. Panakkaje 10. Anaje 11. Maraje 12. Kukkaje 13. Nadaje 14. Kattaje 15. Batpaje 16. Kaylaje 17. Balaje 18. Mangaje 19. Kootaje 20. Kaje 21. Baje 22. Marakkaje 23. Biraje 24. Pettaje 25. Areperaje 26. Yermaje 27. Yinnaje 28. Mundaaje 29. Manje 30. Ballamanje 31. Kemmunje 32. Barinje 33. Amunje 34. Karije 35. Mananje 36. Innanje 37. Elinje 38. Pavunje 39. Belanje 40. Kallanje 41. Kalmanje 42. Perunje 43. Nagunje 44. Heggunje 45. Kudkunje 46. Kadanje 47....48....49. Kenje 50. Ramkunje 51, Kotanje 52. Kodanje 53. Kulkunje 54. Hammunje 55. Kanaje 56. Banninje 57. Totlanje 58. Muje 59. Karaje and 60 Enmaje. These are the sixty sacred groves. Besides, since there are serpent groves connected with each house and every paddy field, this region is known to everybody as *Nāga Loka.* Here if there is an address to a girl, *"Indale, Indabaale"* it harks back to *"Inda Lekkesiri"* Hence there is popular adage in Tulu "I have a deity called *Lekkesiri*, whatever I have or do is meant for her." As the adage suggests, the Tuluvas adore and worship *Naga, Berma, Lekkesiri* and *Aburandāya.* These are referred to as the *Truth* of Tulunadu.

Siri: "Why is that the *Nāga Lōka* is called *Parashurāma*'s creation? How come it got transferred from the *Nagas* to human beings? Tell me everything!"

Bhatta: "If I should tell you everything, I need many days.... All right! Once upon a time there were Yadu, Puru and Turuvasu, belonging to the Lunar Lineage. Among them Turuvasu had a quarrel with his father and was banished. He came to the netherworld, and won over the *Nāga Berma* and unburdened his woes. Impressed with him and what he said, he was given a *Nāga* princess in marriage, and was ordered to adhere to the *Nāga* custom of inheritance. The *Nāga* king then handed over to Turuvasu the palace of Manipura where he himself was born. The place where he was born was called '*Udyāvara*' or *Udayapura*. *Maṇipura* means the place of truth, or *Satyanāpura*. From then onwards, these of the *Naga* lineage were ruling over the kingdom as *Talaveru, Turuveru, Talaberu, Tuluveru, Āluveru, Nageru, Nagajeru, Satujeru, Satyajeru, Satyaputreru and Āluperu.* They carried honourable suffixes such as *Vāhana, Varma, Dhwaja* and *Ālva.* The tradition of inheritance which they follow is called *Ālvera Kaṭṭu.* Your *Bootāḷa Panḍya Kaṭṭu* is the same as this. In course of time, I came here in the name of Parashurama. I saw here many unworthy ways of people, and to set the things right, and ensure people's behaviour in accordance with *shāstras* I brought eight families of Brahmins and settled them here. Thereafter, all the gods and goddesses of this region started getting their due devotion, worship and oblations. That is the reason this region is called the creation of Parasurama. And yet, Parasurama could not evict the *Nāga Kaṭṭu* from here. Then six of God Rama's children married Naga princesses and settled down here. Then Arjuna married a Naga princess by name Chitrangi and left her here. King Kaurava too had visited this place. Bhima too was here. In fact, many eminent people were here before. The place where Arjuna fought his battle with Baburavahana is called Swetavahanapura. Now it is known as Swetapura or *Boḷḷe.* The place where Kaurava sojourned is called 'Kurukula' which is now known as Kurkalu. All these places are in the vicinity of Udyavara. It is an endless story....I

will tell the rest of the story another time. Right now I feel sleepy. Come let us go to bed."

Now both went to bed. Both went to sleep. When the sound of the big drum was heard to announce dawn, Bhatta got up, woke Siridevi up and said,

"I will be back on the next *Sankrānti* day." Having said this, he went out, opened his fly-eagle and flew off.

All these things Daaru saw and heard with close attention. She saw Siridevi leaving the room in the morning, and she too left the room. She narrated all that transpired at night to her friends. She said,

"The one who visited Siridevi at night was not a human being, for sure. The reason is, can a human come flying on a bird? It seems some god has come here and impregnated our Siridevi! Besides, will a girl like Siridevi hand herself over to any lesser being? This is a new amazing story of Kali Age. Don't panic!"

Then Raamu replied,

"Wait for a while. I will now go to her to do her hair-do. Let me see if I can ferret out any of the secrets."

All the maid servants now went about their assigned works. Raamu, after eating her morning rice-gruel, went upstairs and settled down to combing Siridevi's hair.

Raamu: "By the way, my dear Lady! Whatever has happened to your fun-loving ways and talks? Why do you look so different? You always prefer to rest and sleep. You also seemed to look swollen a little in your body. Why is that, Lady?"

Siri: "What? Nothing really! Sometimes I get bored with reading."

Raamu: "Why should you get bored? Aren't we all here at your service? By the way, Lady, how come your belly looks big? It appears as if the pregnancy has advanced to seven months. Tell me if something has gone amiss. I will not divulge it to anybody, Lady! Let us play some tricks with it!"

Hearing this Siridevi flew into a rage and pushed Raamu away.

Siri: "Idiot! Remember who I am before you say anything! You say such things only with strumpets like you! Understand? Has the food you have been eating here been coming out through your eyes? Now, get lost! Do not, hereafter, come to my room upstairs, ever! Get out! If you stay here longer, I will have you thrown out! Bitch! You talk any nonsense you feel like!"

Raamu: "O my dear lady, Siridevi! How I could not imagine that you would not see sense? O my Goddess! What things you were drawn into?"

Siri: "Enough of your notes of song! Get out of this place!"

Raamu: "O dear child! Don't kill us, and don't ever kill yourself! Let's find some treatment to your problem."

Siri: "That treatment you need! I will give it you after telling about it to my uncle! Do you insult me? Now I tell you, you just get lost!"

Raamu: "Why should you tell your uncle? I myself will!"

Siri: "Get out, you bitch! Go and tell him! Away! Do not stay here for a moment!"

Siri pushed Raamu out, by her neck.

Raamu fell down from the staircase. She recovered and got up and narrated the matter to her friends. Then Daaru said,

"You are not able to find out all the details of the secret. I will go to her. We will first find out the whole truth about her before we go to the king. Do not be in a hurry. Let me see her first."

The maids dispersed.

But Siri then said to herself:

"It is true that I am pregnant for seven months. Among my servant maids Raamu has come to know of it. I do not know who all that bitch is going to tell about it. What will people say about me if they come to know about it? What do I say if my uncle asks me about it?"

Thinking thus, she started worrying and crying, all alone.

By then Daaru went to Siridevi and said,

"What, Lady? Did that she-buffalo insult you? What did that barren woman tell you? She is getting out of her eyes whatever she had eaten here. That is why she is talking thus with you. From now on she will have to beg for a bowl-full of rice. Lady! Don't you worry! 'Will the heavens shake if dogs bark?' A woman not even worth a penny! She has the cheek to say anything! You just keep silent. Aren't we here at your service?"

Thus Daaru started pleasing and placating Siridevi.

Daaru then asked, "Dear Lady! Tell me how many nieces did the Lord of the Naga World have?"

Siri: "He had a hundred nieces!"

Daaru: "What was the name of their mother?"

Siri: "The Lord of the Naga World had two younger sisters by *Malasiri* and *Talasiri. Malasiri* had forty daughters and *Talasiri* had sixty."

Daaru: "Right! Yesterday I had dreamt of the *Nāga Berma*'s story all through the night. If I tell about what I had dreamt, people may only laugh!"

Siri: "What dream was that? Let me hear about it."

Daaru: "Why? Is it to tease me and pull my legs? All right! Why do I hesitate to tell about it? I will tell you! Look! At night I went to sleep. Soon I went deep into sleep. Then I dreamt that a bird flew down and, mark, dear Lady! The bird took the form of a man and sat by my bed. I turned to the other side and slept. Then he lay by my side. He then, dear Lady told me the story of *Nāga Berma.* I was asking about it with you just to make sure if that was true. I could not make out what that bird or the human was. He woke me up in the morning and told me that he would be back on Friday to tell the remainder of the story and flew off. Dear Lady! Do not laugh at this story!"

Siri: "[She embraced Daaru] "O Daaru! You are like my elder sister! Tell me what I should do." [Saying thus she started crying.]

Daaru: "If you are bored, let us play some chess!"

Siri: "Keep aside your chess! I could understand the content of your dream!"

Daaru: "Why not? But I could not make out who that bird was."

Siri: "I know who that bird is."

Daaru: "If you know it, you tell me. We can do something later."

Siri: "During the month of *Sōṇa*, one day at midnight, God Narayana came flying on that bird! He then married me. Since He ordered me not to tell you about it, I didn't divulge that secret with any of you. He used to come every night on His flying eagle and leave at dawn. Now I am eight months pregnant. It is three months since I did not see my uncle. If he comes to about this, he may not live. If I take my own life, he would not stay alive either. What should I do now? Tell me, Daaru!"

Daaru: "Are you sure he is really God Narayana? If he is really so, I can console and convince your uncle."

Siri: "I swear, on your life, he is truly God Narayana! When in his previous life he was Lord Krishna, it appears I was His consort, Radha. In this life, he said, I was born here. He is born as a Brahmin and he is visiting me daily. This is true. There is no falsehood here. I swear by the life of my uncle!"

Daaru: "If so, you just keep quiet. I will settle everything."

Having said this, Daaru left Siridevi's room. She had a confabulation with his friends. They then decided on sending Daaru to the king to tell him what had happened. Daaru went to the King. She divulged the secret to him when none was around:

"God Narayana is flying into Siridevi's room upstairs on his eagle! Don't get angry for telling you about this."

Daaru came out of the king's room.

The King went to Siridevi's room upstairs and had a long talk

with her and got all the details about what had happened. He then said to her,

"If what you say is right, I should see that God Narayana! If you lie and you are just bluffing, I will slice off your head and toss it out of the window. Haven't you seen what weapon I am holding?"

The Siridevi replied,

"My dear uncle! Don't you trust me? If you are put to shame, why should I live? On the Friday night next, you wait and watch in the room nearby. But do not hasten to talk to him!"

Having heard what Siri had to say, the King left the room.

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10.

Tale of the Tenth Month

When Chennaraya Chauta was in his durbar hall the *Shānubhōgue* of the palace came there. He submitted that day's account and sought permission to leave. Then Chauta asked him,

"By the way, Shanubhogue! Who in your *Purāṇas* is the God who has a bird as his vehicle?"

Shanubhogue: "God Brahma has swan as his vehicle, God Shanmukha and Goddess Saraswati have peacock, God Narayana has eagle and cock is the vehicle of Goddess Mahadevi. Thus many of our gods roam around in their bird-vehicles."

The King: "Is the God sitting on eagle God Narayana? Is he now young or old? Is he a decent god? Where does he hail from? How many people he has at home? How many children does his mother have? Is he strong and capable? Tell me all about these details!"

Shanubhogue: "If I should tell you all, I need one full day! Now it is getting dark. Let me tell you tomorrow."

The King: "Yes. All right! Collect all possible information about him and tell me tomorrow. Forget not!"

Shanubhogue sank into serious thoughts. "He was, till now deaf to all our *shāstras*! Now he wants to know about the God on his eagle-vehicle, about his father, where his mother was born, capable or useless, young or old. He wants me to collect all information about him and tell him. What, is this King planning to give away a bride to God Narayana? But it is very difficult to explain things to people who know nothing! Who can really cram these details into his head? What demented thoughts he is uttering!" Thinking thus, Shanubhogue went home.

The King somehow pottered around the whole day. Before sunset he washed his hands and feet and had his supper. At night he ate a supplementary repast of fruits and milk, went upstairs and slept in the room next to Siridevi's. He was able to hear the drums sounded by the guards of the palace, announcing of passing of each phase of the night. Besides, he could occasionally hear distant dogs barking or horses neighing. After the mealtime passed and midnight was nearing, he heard a roaring sound of a sea. The King sat up. He saw a big red eagle approaching the window. God Narayana alighted from the eagle and entered the apartment of Siridevi. As they were talking and exchanging pleasantries, Siridevi started shedding tears. God Narayana then embraced her and said,

"O Radha, remember that when you wept in your previous life, I decided to come back to you in this life. If you persist with shedding tears here too, what shall I do? Tell me. I will do your bidding!"

Hearing these words, Siridevi gave him a reassuring smile. She then reminded him to continue the story of *Nāga Berma.*

He said, "I will tell you that story another day, leisurely, and in great detail. Today, my mother has some pain in the leg. So I shall go now."

Saying this, he flew off.

The King saw all that had transpired there and heard all that was said. His happiness knew no bounds! Man should have control

over his feelings and words. If they go unrestrained, they will be a source of trouble. The King was so overwhelmingly happy that he would have said anything to anybody, which they would have mistaken for the words of a lunatic. But he began talking to himself:

"O my God! How strong and true are the *shāstras* of Brahmins! God Narayana is really handsome! He is a strong, young man! He is the right man for our Siridevi! Yes!" Saying this he went to Siridevi's room, and affectionately embraced her and said,

"My dear girl! You are born here because of the accumulated good deeds of all our ancestors. Because of you our family is on the threshold of great days. Do not ever upset the mind and mood of your God! Now go to sleep! Do not lose sleep!"

The King left the room and went back to his apartment for the night's rest.

Next day the King consulted the astrologer for an auspicious day to hold the ritual celebration of Siridevi's *bayake*[1]. He sent invitations to all the local eminences. He duly performed the ritual, according to the prescribed rules and codes. He then said to himself:

"When God Narayana has become the husband of Siridevi, what do we really lack in? I should make sure that our own caste proliferates and becomes strong in this region."

Thinking thus, he assigned the management of all administrative units of his kingdom to his own caste people. He defied all the traditional sources of power and honour like *Guttu, Barke, Baava,*

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[1] *Bayake*, which literally means 'desire', is a ritual of prenatal wish-fulfilment. There is a belief that a pregnant woman hankers for things, particularly gastronomic, both on her behalf and on behalf of the child she is carrying, and that it is important to satisfy them. The ritual is held on her first pregnancy only, usually in the seventh or eighth month, at her husband's house, before she is taken to her mother's house for delivery and confinement. The ritual also includes gifting her with gold, new sarees and other articles of presentation. In Sanskrit the ritual goes by the name of *Seemantha.*

etc. and handed over the power to the Jainas. Instead of ensuring justice to all, whether rich or poor, he surrendered power to his Jaina henchmen. He gave large tracts of land as gifts to the *Jaina Ballāḷas.* The result was, everywhere in the kingdom there were only Jaina towns, *basadis,* Jaina mansion houses and aristocratic residences. There were none to protect or prop up the honour of people of other castes. In all temples, *basadis* and shrines, the dangling symbols of the nude Jaina gods were held aloft. All the high-paid officers of the state were Jainas, and none else. The others could not even eke out their paltry livelihood or buy little rags to cover their bodies even if they toiled from morn to dusk. There was none to restrain the atrocities which the Jaina officers unleashed on hapless people. All the big business and trading activities, all privileges of state loot like tolls became the monopoly of Jainas. If the other castes were called for anything, it was only to collect from them tolls, taxes and fines. If the officers were effectively bribed, land could be easily transferred from one owner to another. All the riches and privileges were reserved for the Jainas. None could refuse them and yet stay in the region. The situation became so bad that it forced many to flee or migrate to other kingdoms. Many new *Guttus* were created for the Jainas every day. Those who had their gods to worship and deities to propitiate and the honour associated with them, would not have any of them the next day. None could complain against these acts of injustices to the King because the King had given up the practice of attending to his duties in the royal durbar. If by chance people met him, he would tell them that there were many wise *Ballāḷas* to listen to their grievances, and that he was too busy to do that job and promptly wriggle out of his duty. Poor people! Who could they turn to or go to unburden their woes and find redress? Who would listen to them? If the fence is out to graze the crops it is supposed to protect, who should protect it? There was no end to the misdeeds of these officers. Any complaint against them would

see the complaining man in a dark dungeon. They would also be fined. They would be comprehensively looted. They would be kept in the jail without food and water till they die a miserable death. People could only plead for succour with God, and none among who could be described as human beings. The situation came to such a pass that people, unable pay their taxes and dues, had to flee their land and live in jungles and mountains. They had nothing to eat. Why a King at all, people would grumble and they went to the heads of Guttus to complain and unburden their woes. Hearing these complaints, the head of Puttige Guttu sent emissaries to the heads of Amunja Guttu, Tookuura Guttu and Inna Guttu for a meeting.

Head of Puttige Guttu: "Now you are aware of the misdeeds of the Jaina officers in our land. What shall we do to stop them? If we do not protect the poor now, we too will become worse than the poor very soon."

Head of Amunja Guttu: "What shall we do? Shall we pull down the King and enthrone some other in his place?"

Head of Puttige Guttu: "What does the head of Tookuuru Guttu say?"

Head of Tookuuru Guttu: "We should see that the Jaina caste is uprooted from the land! We should not allow such miscreants to stay!"

Head of Puttige Guttu: "What do you say, the head of Inna Guttu?"

Head of Inna Guttu: "One of us should go to the King and tell him what is happening in our land. If he turns a deaf ear, let us think of the next step."

Head of Amunja Guttu: "If the King does not give us a sympathetic hearing, we will take the complaint to the Banga king."

Head of Tookuuru Guttu: "But the Banga King is a Jaina, isn't he?"

Head of Amunja Guttu: "Though the Banga King is a Jaina, he understands the pain and difficulties of the poor."

Head of Tookuuru Guttu: "Doesn't the Chouta king know the predicament of the poor? How well he was looking after his kingdom till recently!"

Head of Amunja Guttu: "But what is happening to him now? Who has misled him to his present ways?"

Head of the Puttige Guttu: "Who? Is it the vicious deity, Guliga? He has become egotist because of success and fame. He does not know where exactly he is now. It appears his niece has given birth to a child without going through the trouble of getting married! Damn it! We do not know what the source of his ego is! But our land has gone to dogs! They say the King is in debt, and is on the verge of insolvency. Whatever resources he had he has spent on the salaries of these Jaina officers and their unending expenses. The King will learn his lessons, for sure and soon."

Head of Amunja Guttu: "What does he learn? He only knows how to increase his levies on the Guttus."

Head of Inna Guttu: "It is only after we pay the amount already levied that he would increase the levy further, wouldn't he?"

Head of Tookuuru Guttu: "If we do not pay, we may have to lose our properties! That is all!"

Head of Amunja Guttu: "Leave that aside! In fact, we may have to evict him and take his place, as things were earlier."

Head of Puttige Guttu: "Let us think about it later. I will now go to the King, tell him all about the things taking place here and warn him. If I do not get the right and satisfactory answer from him, we will then think it over and decide on the future course of action. We will meet on the next *Sankrānti* day. I will let you know the result of my meeting with the King. Please come on that day, all of you."

They agreed and they all dispersed.

Today the palace is in a festive mood. A few days back on the eighteenth day of the month of *Perārde*, on the early morning of Friday, Siridevi had given birth to a girl child. Today is the naming ceremony of the child. On the one hand, the barber and the washer man came there to ritually purify the child and other the Indras were present to perform the religious ritual connected with the naming ceremony and write the horoscope of the child. It read: In the *Shālivāhana Shaka* era of 1348 of the *Prabhava samvatsara,*[2] in the month of *Mārgashira*, 12th Friday, at the 7th *galige* after sunrise, at the zodiac sign of *Makara.* They had the *Maṇḍala Pooja* performed at Bolmannu and gifted a token piece of land in the name of the newborn child. The child was named after the grandmother, Chennammaji, and was formally so addressed. Many poor people had been invited to receive alms on the occasion. All the invitees were given suitable gifts. All the heads of the Guttus, Barke and Baragas of the village, Jaina settis and big merchants, the Ballalas of *buḍus* and *baavas, seṭṭis, pergaḍe* and *athikāris* had all gathered there. The King was formally seated on the throne and held a grand court. He gave the people a gift of oil to be applied on their heads, clothes to wear and rice to eat.

By this time the head of Puttige Guttu reached the palace, riding on a white horse and paid obeisance to the King. He then joined the eminences gathered there. He drank a refreshing drink and chewed betel leaves and nuts. He then beseeched the King to listen to his complaint and sought from him a suitable reply.

The King: "Tell me, the Head of Puttige Guttu! What have you to say? What do you want?"

The Head of Puttige Guttu: [He stood up and saluted the King] "Your Lordship may listen to what I have to say and give me a suitable answer. Now the kind of misrule unleashed by the various

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[2] *Samvatsara* is year in the cycle of sixty, as per the Hindu calendar.

officers of the state and powerful Ballalas is such that we are not be able to witness any such thing in any other kingdom. If this continues, your royalty may not survive for long. Our eyes cannot see nor can our ears hear the ways in which your officers harass the poor. They have been imposing taxes and tolls so much and so freely that the poor are not even left with rice gruel to drink. They have withdrawn all the traditional endowments which you had given to people like stone-cutters and sculptors, carpenters, craftsmen, weavers and potters. Added to that, they have levied harrowing taxes on them. They seem to have a design to see that the poor do not light their hearth every day. Our people have started fleeing to other kingdoms. Since all the power is concentrated in the hands of one caste people, there is a feeling of bitter resentment in the minds of others. That is why we request the King to look in to the grievances of the poor and redress them, and see that the King runs the administration as he once used to do. If things are left to the mismanagement of your officers and henchmen, your kingdom will be in grave danger! That is why please ensure that our honour and privileges are duly restored."

Having said this, the Head of Puttige Guttu occupied his seat.

The King: "What? How come the Settis and the Ballalas are keeping silent? By what we hear from the Head of Puttige Guttu, it appears that there is none who is really responsible for the good governance of the kingdom! Why so? Tell me!"

Ballala: "The Head of Puttige is reporting only what he had heard as rumours! In fact, there are many more things to do in our kingdom. Since there are heavy arrears of taxes and tolls, the palace is reeling under heavy debt. Its present income is not enough even to pay the interests on our loans. We have considered the grievances of the people and we have given them enough time to pay their arrears of taxes. None has left this kingdom because they were harassed. Those who defaulted heavily on the payment of land taxes, were made to forfeit their lands, which we have transferred to others.

In fact, the administration of the kingdom is run on more efficient lines now. To stop the activities of ruffians and mischief-mongers, we have put some of them in jail. There is nothing untoward happening in our kingdom. People are living happily now, building big, impressive houses of their own. We are all working hard, day and night, keeping in the mind the motto that the glory and welfare of the kingdom depends on the happiness of its people. Nothing has really happened in our kingdom as has been luridly described by the Head of Puttige Guttu!"

The King: "The Head of the Guttu! Hope you have listened to what has been said! They say things are run better than before! Now do things as per their directions! Give what is due to the state. Reprimand the goons and mischief-mongers and ensure their good behaviour. If you are disciplined, they would be disciplined too. Let you both parties live in harmony! The officers are all knowledgeable. That is why it is your collective responsibility to protect and work for the honour of the King and the kingdom. So cooperate and live well. I will go in and take my bath!"

Having said this, the King went in to take his bath.

Having heard a prevaricating reply as slippery as a plantain leaf smeared with a lump of butter, the Head of Puttige Guttu went out of the place in a huff and sent messengers to the fellow heads of Guttus for consultation. When they arrived, he treated them to a banquet and conveyed to them what the King had said and decreed. Then they all decided on going to the Banga ruler and petition him for help. They reached the Banga kingdom, saluted the ruler and gave all the details of what was happening in the Chouta kingdom. They gave also gave him all the details of the meeting with the Chouta ruler and the arguments and responses there. At the end they begged the Banga ruler to protect them from the Chouta misrule.

The Banga ruler gave them a patient hearing, extended all the hospitality and promised them all help. He then summoned his

confidential Minister and got a letter drafted to the Chouta King and sent it through an emissary. The messenger made a customary presentation to the Chouta King and submitted the palm-leaf letter folded into a roll after paying obeisance to the King. The Chouta King received the roll, ordered refreshments to the emissary, honoured him with betel leaf and nuts and asked him,

"Whose emissary are you? What business brings you here?"

The messenger made the following submission:

"My Lord! I am the messenger of the Banga ruler. I am commissioned to hand over this letter to you and bring him your reply, my lord!"

Saying this, he sat down in the seat offered to him.

The King said: "Yes! Now go, take your bath and eat your meal." Saying this he sent the emissary away.

The King opened the letter and read it. He said to himself, "Banga has now become a monkey! Or else would he write a letter like this?" He then smiled and went in, carrying the letter with him and gave it to Siridevi. She read it. Now listen to what was written in that letter:

"Your Highness, the King of Kings, the Lord of the Tulu Universe, the Supreme Head of Sixteen Cities, a True Jaina Champion and a True Warrior and the Lord of All Lands, the Most Valiant among the Valorous, the Commandant of Forty-six thousand Soldiers, the one born in the Chouta lineage, the great son of Paḍumalādēvi, to the Lotus Feet of Chennarāya, the Chouta King -

A humble letter of submission by Guṇapāla Banga Raja of Nandāvara: Hope you are all doing well, as we are. Now, -We have heard complaints that you have not been paying attention to the details of administration, that you have handed over all powers to people of your caste, that you have taken away all the legitimate privileges and rights of the sons of the soil, that

you are deaf to the complaints and entreaties of your subjects, that you are imposing on them unjust and oppressive taxes, that you have your subjects plundered by your own men, that you have denied your subjects even the little freedom to find one meal a day, and so on. Therefore, we entreat you to restore the rights and privileges of your subjects on their land. And you are expected to conduct your rule as per the ancient custom and tradition. If you deny the rights of your subjects to their livelihood, you should hand over the kingdom to them. If you are unwilling to accept either of these two options, we may have to intervene and settle the matter, as per the code of royalty, through war. Therefore, think over the matter with all seriousness and favour us with a prompt and prudent reply.

Date: Pushya Bahuḷa 2 Friday *Yours Obediently*
Shālivāhana Shaka, 1348 *Sd/-*
Signature of Guṇapāla, the Banga King

Siridevi, after reading the royal letter and spoke to her uncle,

"What is this uncle? Why have you kept quiet and unconcerned till the complaints against our kingdom reached the Banga ruler? Now what should we do? If you had listened to the complaints from the heads of the Guttus sympathetically and sorted out the problems, things would not have come to this pass. If the poor are harassed thus, how can they live? If we cannot run the administration properly and look into their welfare, it is better that we keep with us whatever money we need for our expenses and hand over to them all their lands! If people are happy, the kingdom will be happy. If they are not, why do we need our kingdom? Therefore I suggest that you send an amicable reply and send for the heads of our Guttus and promise them that you would restore their old powers and privileges. Or else, we are going to destroy ourselves, for sure. This is what is

going to happen if you credulously listen to what your officers say. When the war is precipitated tomorrow, none of them will be here to help you. Beware!"

The King: [Hearing this, the King became furious.] "I have not come here to seek your advice in the matter. I don't fear this Banga, monkey or donkey! If the people are not happy to live in my kngdom, let them go up the ghats! What do I care? This is not Banga's father's property for me to hand it over to him; nor does it belong to people. This is what has come to us from our ancestors. To whom should I surrender this? What do you know? Keep your mouth shut!"

Siri: "I am not suggesting surrendering your kingdom. But why can't you look after the poor well and with due consideration, as you were doing before? If they are harassed in every way, how should they live?"

The King: "Who has harassed them, tell me! If they do not listen to authorities, they would be punished, that's all. Is it wrong? Do we fear these rulers? Even if all of them gang up against me, I fear them not. All we should do is to appeal to God Narayana! He will chase them away!"

Siri: "If we do all the injustice, God will not take our side!"

The King: "Why not? He is not to decide what is right and what is wrong! If He wants to protect His own family, let Him! If not, what do I lose? You tell Him!"

Siri: "What are you talking about, uncle? If we do not have concern for our own subjects, and fight against others, is it right to push the poor into greater abyss of misery?"

The King: "Be that as it may! You tell Him!"

Saying this, the King came down from the room upstairs and went to his durbar hall. He sent for his officers and Ballalas and instructed them to write a reply to the letter he had received and gave them the royal letter of approval. He asked them to demand one month's time for the next course of action. He said that if our

reply proves unsatisfactory and precipitates war, we cannot leave the kingdom, anyway. If it is war, so be it! If it is just a loud-mouthed bragging, it is fine too! This is how the King instructed his men.

The reply to the letter of the Banga king was this:

"We have duly noted the contents of your letter. There is nothing in our kingdom as your letter describes it. We have not done anything to harass our people. It is for their own sake that we have appointed skilled people, giving them due consideration, to do business well and more efficiently. We have paid the salaries, on every Sankranthi day, to all the managers and functionaries of the temples. We have made new roads for the convenience of the people; but of course, we have been collecting tolls on them. It is our custom to levy taxes on profitable business. Poverty has not yet stepped into our kingdom. People, everywhere, have been building palatial houses and living happily there. We have not yet come across people going hungry or without clothes to wear. If we have to surrender the administration to people just because some of them ask for it, they would not be in a position to manage their own affairs, and the kingdom will go to rack and ruin. All important works in the kingdom have been assigned to the right, knowledgeable people. If the weak and ignorant people are asked to perform important work, the kingdom will surely come to grief. We have not seen or heard till today any instance of injustice or predatory acts. We have been running the administration with a firm belief that the kingdom's greater good is achieved only through the welfare of the people. However, if you listen to the evil reports and counsel of unworthy people and venture into a mad course of war, you will be ruined for sure. It is not good for either of us to fight with each other and destroy ourselves"

Such a reply was drafted and the royal seal was duly affixed and was sent through the Banga emissary.

The Banga ruler read the reply. He summoned all his allies and heads of Guttus. He conveyed the content of the reply he had received, and said,

"This means 'The Chouta's gang is sure to mount the funeral pyre readied for them!' What can we do? But before we set out with our armies, we should duly inform the Karkala ruler of the matter and get the assistance and cooperation of all." Saying this, he sent appropriate letters of invitation to the ruler of Karkala and those of other kingdoms in the region. He also requested his allies to be ready on the plateau of Belvai for the impending showdown. The Banga King made the necessary preparations for the battle at hand.

The heads of the Guttus returned to their respective stations.

Well, let them!

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11.

Tale of the Eleventh Month

These days look at anybody in the Kayaramanja palace, they look sick and run down. The King looks nearly unhinged! In the towns and villages, those who had some money or gold with them started burying them here and there. Some precious things they threw into the well. A lot of whispers were heard, but none was willing to speak openly. When inquired into, it was found that the forces of the king of Karkala from up the north had already moved up to the plateau of Belvai and is battle-ready. They were joined by the forces of the Banga king from the south. Since the Chauta King came to know of this, he panicked and began to move around restlessly. All inquiries showed that none in his kingdom seemed willing to go to battle on his behalf. Desperate, he hurried to his niece Siridevi and told her that enemies were at his gate.

Siri: "If we neglect our own kingdom, this is what is going to befall us. What should we do now? You do not listen to any sane advice! When the heads of the Guttus and big landlords of our kingdom advised you, you merely spurned them with contempt. Now all that we can do is to send for them, honour them, restore their power and privileges and get back their confidence

and support. Without their help we can do nothing. Have you now realised the consequences of favouring the unworthy people of our own caste? The poor alone can be the prop of our kingdom!"

The King: "That is what we can do later. But what do we do now? We should now see how best we can overcome the forces that threaten to overwhelm our kingdom."

Siri: "Why later? You call the heads of the Guttus and landlords tomorrow only and restore them their rights and powers. You strip the people of our caste of their power and recruit them in the army. Make Donnappa Nayaka the commander of your forces and permit him to lead your forces. Then won't they protect their own kingdoms?"

The King: "Yes! But our subjects are hungry and desperate. How can they fight?"

Siri: "We will see about it later. With the forces that have advanced against us, negotiate for a reprieve of eight days. Hand over the administration to your own people. Then trust in God! Let us see."

The King: "Yes. I will do what you have suggested. But you should do a favour. You should request God Narayana to chase away the invading forces! We have none else to fall back upon! Without trusting Him, I have lost everything. Now, however, if He is able to bail me out of the danger I am facing, promise Him that henceforth I would be obedient to Him and be solicitous of people's welfare in future. You promise Him on my behalf and protect the kingdom this time. Or else I am not sure if I would live. Nor can I live and stay in my kingdom. Our own people have now turned into our enemies!"

Siri: "At least now, have you realised your folly? When I advised you the other day, you were quick to rebuke me!"

The King: "Let bygones be bygones! But for now, appeal to your God and save me!"

Siri: "Yes. But you should hand over power to your people tomorrow only. Do you agree?"

Next morning the King sent for all the heads of Guttus and landlords, as advised by Siridevi. He restored their powers and privileges. He formally commissioned them to join the army by giving them betel leaves and nuts. Setting aside murmurs of dissent, he made public announcement, through beating of drums, that all the powers had been restored to his people. He called the heads of Guttus and landlords and requested them to protect the kingdom even as they guard their own rights and privileges. In a letter he requested the invading forces to give him time of one week to decide upon his own course of action.

Hearing this news, people were overjoyed. They picked up their rusted scythes and swords and started sharpening them in great enthusiasm. Bowmen readied their weapons. Everyone made all the preparations for the impending battle. The day couldn't quite contain the happiness and enthusiasm of people. The day gave place to night. Even at night people were busy doing things they had begun during the day. They were busy sharpening swords, spears and scythes.

After the mealtime and as the midnight was drawing near, Bhatta in the guise of God Naryana flew into the room of Siridevi. Siri prostrated before her God and broke into tears. Seeing her cry, he lifted her up and asked her, "What happened to you? What is the matter? What misfortune befell you? Tell me!" Saying this, he embraced her.

Siri: "O my God! There is no God greater than you! When I have married such a great God as you, and I have trusted you so implicitly, my uncle has yet lost his royal power! He ruined his kingdom; he has left me with no support or succour. The kingdom is besieged from all four sides. My uncle has told me that he would not stay alive if he failed to win this war. If my uncle dies, I will not stay

alive a minute more. This you can be sure. On my oath upon you, this is true! If you really want me, you should fight this war, and ensure that my uncle wears the garland of victory next Tuesday! Or else, you may as well forget me!"

Hearing this, Narayana Bhatta felt as if someone had struck his head with an axe. Poor fellow! What can a poor Brahmin do? Fighting in a battle is not the same thing as eating at the feast of obsequies. It is not like enjoying sweet *holiges* at a wedding feast. It is not like rattling off holy incantations to make a claim on any ritual gift on offer. It is not the same as spending time in useless blather. Bhatta would not have fallen short in any of these things! He had succeeded in proving many a lie, fraud or trick as so many convincing, impressive truths. Now he finds himself in a desperate position of a man who is left alone in a jungle with his eyes blindfolded!

Bhatta: "O mad girl! Didn't I tell you? Why did you tell your uncle that I am a God? I cannot do anything!"

Siri: "The whole world knows that you are a playful God! If you don't fight and win against the enemy forces, mark my words! I vow in the name of my uncle that I will take my own life!"

Saying this she resumed crying.

Bhatta was at a loss to decide what he should do next. He then thought it was best for him to die before Siri and his uncle did. He said to himself: "If I die in the battle, people will say that the true God Narayana fought and perished. Hence I will not lose the battle, anyway! If I do not go to the battle, Siridevi is sure to die. If so, why should I live?" Saying to himself that he would face whatever he has to, he consoled Siridevi, but muttered to himself that all that he had planned is reduced to dust before he left the place.

But our Bhatta is clever and shrewd. He is known to impress people and win over them with his oily tongue. He is seen as an expert in playing a son against his father. His gratitude to the one who helped him would not last a minute more; he would not care to

remember anyone for the help rendered to him. He excelled in making fun of people in their absence. He was like a true brother to Sankraya Achary; but now he ignores him like a stranger. But today Bhatta remembered Sankraya Achary and headed for his house.

When Sankraya Achary saw Bhatta coming, he stood up and spread a mat of welcome and said,

"Our Bhatta Sir has become a rarity these days! How is your business going?" He then offered the guest betel leaves and nuts.

Bhatta: "Why do you play your pranks with me? You are the one who had saved my life. Who is a greater god for me than you? Now, what do you plan to do with me? Should I live or die?"

Saying this Bhatta broke into tears!

Achary: "What Sir? What has befallen you? How can a poor man like me save your life? For your sake I had worked for three and a half months, day in and day out, to prepare that flying contraption of an eagle. Working hard and losing sleep, I was down with fever for the next six months! By the time I recovered, I wasn't even left with my ear-ring! Now, though sick and weak, I am driven to work hard just to eke out my livelihood. From now on I do not want to be involved in the affairs of others, either for good or bad. I merely have to take care of myself. Why should I worry over your affairs? Tell me! You are a very important person. 'If great people wish it, they have their funeral pyre in the big field in front of them!' Why should I get involved in your affairs?"

Bhatta: "Enough of that! I understand your difficulties. If you were short of money, why didn't you ask me for money? Now take this. It has ten *varahas* in it."

Bhatta gave him a little purse.

Achary: "That is all right! Now, what do you want me to do? As the adage goes, when it sees coins even a corpse would talk! Tell me what is your problem? Tell me sir! I will do what I can. But you should tell me what I should do."

Bhatta: "You can do many things! But right now, the rulers of Karkala and the Banga ruler have brought their armies for a war against the Chouta King. How can I die before this war? Tell me!"

Achary: "If they are involved in a battle, what is that to you? Even there you stand to gain! The Brahmins stand to benefit whether people die or they are born. But why should you die?"

Bhatta: "No, you do not understand it! Listen to the story first and then tell me what you think of it."

Achary: "The story is the old one! If many people die, you have no problem for the next ten years!"

Bhatta: "Damn your playful words! Here I am struggling to keep myself alive!"

Achary: "All that you have to do is to stand at a convenient distance and rattle off a few incantations!"

Bhatta: "Please, for heaven's sake, listen to what I have to say! Then say whatever you want to."

Achary: "I am only condemned to listen to what others say! That is my only work! Tell me!"

Bhatta: "If on the battle scheduled for the next Tuesday, the Chouta King loses, Siridevi has vowed to put an end to her life!"

Achary: "Why should she die? You bring her here on Monday! Two of you can manage to fly back on the fly-eagle!"

Bhatta: "That is not the problem! She said she would not live under any circumstances if the King dies! If she dies, why should I live?"

Saying this Bhatta began another round of crying!

Achary: [He said to himself: Why should this Brahmin cry? Has he gone out of his mind? If she dies, why should he die too? Ah! I understand it now? If she dies, who will give him money anymore? If he is penniless, who cares for him? 'A penniless man should leave one's country.' This person cannot do that! Be that as it may; let me ask him.] "Tell me, what do you want now?"

Bhatta: "You know that I had seduced her in the guise of God Narayana? It seems she had told all about it to the King. Hearing this and seeing me, he has placed the whole burden of the kingdom on God Narayana. Trusting Him, and consulting none, he has hopelessly mismanaged things. When God is with him, why should he bother about anything? Thinking thus, he has allowed his kingdom to slide into anarchy. Now all the other kings have ganged up against him and besieged his kingdom. He has none with him to fight against the enemy. He has negotiated for eight days' time before he could decide on his course of action. Yesterday, Siri told me all about what happened and cried. I could not tell her anything as a convincing or consoling reply. I have now come back with a promise that I myself would take the field. Don't you think it is better for me to quit this world?"

Achary: "You have changed from being a Brahmin to a God. Why do you worry? The true God Narayana himself will protect you! You just keep silent! Why do you worry about it?"

Bhatta: "Now, for God's sake, give up your pranks and speak plainly."

Achary: "I have given up my playful ways long back. You are the one who is caught up in it. But your lies, deceit and skulduggery excel anybody else's. Now, as they add milk to water, you should add deceit to your lies!"

Bhatta: "We have done it all, haven't we? What else can we add?"

Achary: "You want to know? I will tell you!"

Bhatta: "It is better to live than to die, isn't it? Therefore, I will do anything that you suggest!"

Achary: "If that's what you agree, you should now become the Impostor God Narayana!"

Bhatta: "How can I become? Leave that talk, and suggest something else."

Achary: "If I suggest anything else, things won't work!"

Bhatta: "Tell me what makes sense and feasible."

Achary: "Why should I suggest what will not work?"

Bhatta: "Tell me straight, man! I will do whatever you suggest!"

Achary: "You should be sitting on the wooden fly-eagle and pose yourself as God Narayana! I will craft for you a wooden discus. You also carry the conch you use in your daily worship. You fly around the enemy forces and blow the conch, and whirl the discus. The enemy forces will simply flee in fear and panic. But beware! Don't ever go flying low enough to be caught by them! If you do what I say, you will surely be victorious. See and try!"

Bhatta: [He embraced Achary] "You are really my God! There is none above you! But you should get that discus ready for me by tomorrow! Will you?"

Achary: "How can I give it tomorrow? I need eight days to make it."

Bhatta: "All right! I will give you another ten *varahas*. Give that discus on Monday, - day after tomorrow"

Achary: "Ten *varahas* wouldn't do! If you send twenty-five *varahas* now, I may make it and give you!"

Bhatta promised to send that money and left.

Achary thought for himself: Why should I help this Bhatta? Is it to give him a chance to speak ill of me? To brag about his power? Or, to show off his richness? When I toiled for more than three months and fell ill for six months, where was this Bhatta? He did not so much as inquire if his friend Achary was alive or dead. A man like this Bhatta will make a lot more fortune for himself but what would he give people like me? 'God should give, and I should enjoy!'

While Achary was thinking thus, Bhatta returned and handed over a bag of money and went back.

At the Kayaramanja palace, the King simply could not relish his food! He couldn't snatch a moment's sleep. He didn't know

what his people would do next. He was sure that none could save him except God Narayana. Thinking thus, he lay down alone in a corner, without food and without sleep. Seeing this, Siridevi too went without food or sleep and lay down in a corner, crying. Sometimes she would be thinking as to what her God Narayana was planning to do. Poor creatures! What else can they do? The King had disbanded his armies, placing his entire trust in the powers of his omnipotent God!

The kingdom was being besieged on all sides by the enemies, as if ocean had surrounded it. There was more and more news of more and more enemy armies arriving, and there was no other news! And yet, the King placed his trust entirely in his God and remained steadfast in the face of danger. He drummed up his announcement in his kingdom wherever it could be heard and sent letters where it could not be. It said: "All the male subjects above sixteen and below sixty, all those who were wearing waist cloth and turbans, all tenants and bondsmen, all the heads of Guttus and *barke* and *bāva*, all people around and those living far away, the residents of every house, should hasten to join the army." He notified it all over his kingdom.

By the afternoon of Monday, people from far and near, started streaming in to join the army. The King welcomed everyone, fed everyone and honoured everyone. He ordered everyone to get up early next morning. He also had his repast and went to bed.

By next morning the heads of Guttus and landlords, along with their foot soldiers and cavalry reached the precincts of the palace. The sound of drum, trumpet, horn, bands and pipes were heard as if sounding the beginning of the battle. On the one side a thousand soldiers wielding mighty cudgels marched along. There were hundred Mundala men marching as vanguards. At the rear were seven hundred Mugeras. There were five hundred Sapalyas wielding their spears. There were eight hundred Billavas or bowmen. There were three hundred swordsmen. There were a hundred landlords on the

horseback. There were fifteen kings riding on the back of elephants. There was an accompanying contingent of sixty Baidyas or medicine men. There were groups of servants and errand boys of six hundred men. Thus the total men ready for the battlefield setting out from the Chouta palace numbered four thousand three hundred and seventy five. Seeing this sight, the King got up and said,

"You should win today's battle and return with an adorning garland of victory around your neck!" He made the Head of the Puttige Guttu the Commander-in-Chief and gave him the formal commission with the accompanying gift of betel leaves and nuts. He paid obeisance to the *daivas* of the land and prostrated before *Nāga Berma;* he remembered the royal *daivas* and sought their blessings and help before heading for the battlefield.

Early in the morning of Tuesday, the forces of the Karkala king joined those of the Banga king on the plateau of Belvai. They decided on the place of battle and arranged the soldiers in battle formation. On either side stood the trumpeters, drummers, pipers and horn blowers as also those holding flags. At the head were those men wielding cudgels, with shields to protect their persons. Behind them were Mundalas, wearing coloured waist-cloths and wearing spathe-caps, wielding swords and shields. On either side stood Mugeras, carrying bundles of cudgels and basketfuls of swords and scythes to be supplied to the soldiers whenever they needed them. The Biruvas or bowmen carrying their bows and quivers were stationed in the strategic places. Behind them were Sapalyas, holding swords in one hand and crowbars in another. At the head of every row were placed commanders on their horseback. There were signal men to indicate the movements of the army. When they moved their signal-rods, the soldiers marched, to the accompaniment of drums, pipes and trumpets. At a distance were stationed the kings on the howdahs of their elephants. Around these elephants were the heads of Guttus and landlords, sword in hand, seated on their respective

horses. Around them were drummers, pipers, trumpeters, wielders of torches, flambeaux and flags, all making their sounds and noises. The noise was such that it resembled the angry roar of the sea at Tulunadu in the rainy season of *Kārthel.* The colourful dresses they wore resembled the colour of the rainbow that occurs on a cloudy sky in the evening. That day people assembled thickly as they would on the occasion of a big buffalo race.

At that time in the far horizon of the sky was heard a distinct sound of conch! Everyone perked up and began to turn to the direction from where the sound was coming. They saw somebody, resembling the Sun God coming on a flying eagle. As he came near, they saw someone whirling a discus. The eagle and the man on it started zooming around the assembled armies. Unable to understand the mystery of it, the soldiers lay prostrate and bowed to the God perched on the eagle. Many people began to discuss things among themselves: "What is this miracle in this Kali Age! Where has this miraculous discus come from? Why did God Narayana come out of his station at the Milky Ocean?" They looked at each other's face, utterly perplexed. They again heard the resounding sound of conch! The eagle went round, came down a little and moved up again! Those who were watching this bizarre event were too stunned to speak to each other about it. They felt as if they were petrified by what they saw.

When this Brahmin was playing this prank, the real God Narayana of four arms, lying on his serpent bed floating on the milky ocean was watching it! He smiled and saw the faces of those around Him. But none dared to ask the God as to why He smiled. They all watched his mighty discus Sudarshana. The discus bowed before the God and said,

"My Lord! You would not smile without reason! Since we do not know why you smiled, please let us know it." It again prostrated before the God. God Narayana asked Sudarshana to get up and He said,

"Look here! I have been hearing a King and a girl crying for the last four or five days. These days things like gods, *daivas*, Vedas, *shāstras* and the stories of the *purāṇas*, are looked upon as so many cock-and-bull stories. May be only one in a thousand truly believes in me. In such a situation, when I found out who was actually crying, - what shall I tell you? What little honour and respect you and I are held in, we are sure to lose now! The reason is, listen! One Brahmin has posed himself as God Narayana and seduced a princess, married her and promptly produced a child. Reposing implicit faith in that God, her uncle has forgotten and abandoned all his duties as ruler and is sitting there like a monkey and crying helplessly. That girl too has given up eating and is busy crying for help from me. Now that ruler's kingdom is besieged on all four sides by his enemies. And this Brahmin is sitting on a wooden fly-eagle and is fast whirling a wooden discus around a wooden stick. He is blowing a broken, silly conch! If he goes a little low in altitude, the bowmen would shoot him down. Either he dies or he will be wounded and will run away from the place. Either way, we are the losers here. Because, - people will believe that God Narayana has challenged us for a battle; he died in the battle or fled the battlefield, wounded and humiliated. Then I will be facing such a humiliation. Not only that; the King and his niece have been reposing full faith in us, giving up their food and water, day and night. It is our duty to protect those who trust us. What shall I do? Tell me!"

Sudarshana said, "I will obey your orders!" and prostrated before Him.

Then God Narayana said: "To ensure that those poor and innocent people who trust in me are not let down, to make sure that our honour is not sullied in any way, to ensure that people have greater faith and devotion in me, we should play a trick: You should go there now. Do not harm that Brahmin now. You should first go there and be a part of that useless mock discus of his. You then

emerge from there and going round furiously in the battlefield, chase away the enemies. On your way back, set fire to the wooden fly-eagle of that Brahmin and see that he is wounded in the leg. If you kill him, that girl will surely die. So if you burn that fly-eagle and wound him in his leg, he will realise that there is still a great God above him. Do not do anything more!"

Saying this, God Narayana sent Sudarshana to the battlefield.

Sudarshana came to the battlefield, as directed by God Naryana. He then quietly merged into the discus of the Impostor Narayana. When the discus was flung at the army, Sudarshana let out a huge, blood-curdling roar. He then took one round over the enemy army, with fire blazing forth in great fury. Not able to withstand the fiery flame, the elephants, horses, soldiers and whatever the commanders there were panicked and ran for their dear lives in every directions. Sudarshana chased the fleeing soldiers and animals and roared again! At this everyone fled, the enemy soldiers and people. Taking three rounds Sudarshana returned to the hollow discus the Brahmin impostor was wielding. He then set fire to the wings of wooden fly-eagle to frighten the Brahmin! Sudarshana then left the scene, went back to the True God Narayana and reported the matter.

At this time, the army of the Chouta king was still marching towards the battlefield. Then he saw people rushing to him and falling at his feet. They said, "My Lord! The enemy forces were chased away by the Sun God, who came by the sky. The enemy forces have left behind all their weapons and vehicles and run away to all directions!" They thus gave the King the news of what all had taken place on the battlefield even before his arrival.

But since the army could not return without going to the battlefield, the King proceeded to the battlefield. At this time, an old, shrivelled man came hopping and singing there and prostrated before the King. He said: "My Lord! There is not a soul in the battlefield! There are only heaps of swords, spears, javelins, elephants and horses there,

my lord! But there is a Brahmin by the side of a huge bird being roasted in flames! There is nothing else there, my lord!" Saying this, he prostrated again.

The King then rushed to the battlefield and saw the fly-eagle of God Narayana burning! The God himself was holding his leg with one hand and his head in another and was seated by the side of his burning fly-eagle! The King ran to him and fell at his feet and begged him to pardon him for whatever wrong he might have committed. He raised the limping God and made him sit on his elephant to take him to his palace before sending him to Siridevi's apartment upstairs. The King said, "My God! None has lost hitherto who have reposed trust in you! I know you were inconvenienced a little because of me! You are now fatigued! It is your responsibility to protect me and my kingdom! If I know one, I know not nine! Siridevi is a child who knows nothing! Henceforth, you alone should take care of us!"

The Impostor God replied,

"I had long back told Siridevi that I would not do anything in this Kali Age! But because of her childish pranks, it became a little difficult for me. There is nothing more! My fly-eagle has left me in a huff! I am wondering how I should go back. That's all. Nothing more."

He then asked Siridevi to rub oil on his aching leg!

* * *

12.

Tale of the Twelfth Month

Today the whole kingdom of the Chouta king is in a festive mood. Everywhere the elephants and horses were tied to the tethers. Many were busy arranging to carry head-loads of swords and other weapons. People were bringing all kinds of things which they were able to collect in the battlefield and heaping them up in front of the palace. In the main hall of the royal palace where justice was administered, there were heaps of swords and weapons. On the one side of the palace there were cavalry men of the king's subordinates and on another were the men of the heads of Guttus and landlords. There were shows of stick-fights, wrestling, and drum-dances all around. The palace had arranged a grand feast for everybody. Everyone had gathered there, - the rich and the poor, the young and old, villagers and townsmen, men and women and all. The King had sent repeated invitations, through persons or letters, to those heads of Guttus and landlords who could not make it for the occasion. Everyone had a grand lunch at the palace. Thereafter people gathered in knots to discuss men and matters.

After everyone had his lunch, the King came to the main hall of the palace, where he welcomed all the

allied kings, heads of Guttus and landlords, villagers and townsmen, and traders and merchants. He discussed things about the administration of the kingdom. He promised everyone that he would conduct his rule as he did before and gave everyone the formal betel leaves and nuts as a mark of trust and faith. He announced that his kingdom was protected by none other than God Narayana! He had God Narayana brought to the royal hall in a new dress and appropriate adornments. He made him sit on a suitable seat nearby. The King and his subjects then stood up, and the King said,

"God! This kingdom is yours from today! We are all your humble subjects. We will obey your orders. You have to protect us in future even as you have protected us now!"

Then they all prostrated before him! The King continued,

"God! You should stay here and rule this kingdom so long as we live. You should, now and then, give us lessons in wisdom and morality!"

The God smiled! He then said,

"I have now heard what you have said. I had resolved not to perform any divine miracles in this life. Born though I am as a human, I had asked my eagle-vehicle to be available to me for my daily mobility. Yesterday, in the battle, he took umbrage at me and left me. I am now worried on that account. If I call him, he refuses to come! What am I to do?"

Then the King said, "God! If you leave this kingdom, we, all of us, are sure to follow you! Therefore you should stay here and ensure that other kings do not turn hostile against us. That's why your Eagle has left you! But now, tell me, God! How should we conduct ourselves from now on?"

Then the Impostor Narayana replied,

"You send letters of invitations to the king of Karkala and the Banga king and request them to come here. Restore their horses and elephants and the weapons. Make an agreement with them that

henceforth they would not invade your territory. You demand some of their villages. Live henceforth in harmony as children of the same mother! I still have pain in my leg. I will go inside!"

He got up and struggled to walk a few steps, which he did for the sake of his honour, before he went inside.

Poor thing! Poor Brahmin! He was left with only one and a half legs! But still he would not give up uttering lies! He had his pain in the leg when he fell down from his fly-eagle and got wounded. But that pain may stay with him till his death! That is the punishment God has inflicted on him for his lies, - to lie on a bed of thorns! With that pain he can neither walk nor lie down to sleep. What can he do? He lacks nothing to eat but cannot either stand or walk. Thus, though he is living like a king in heaven, he is yet undergoing the pain of hell! He has realised that his traditional priestly occupation in his own place was so much better than his suffering here. But he has to reap what he had sown, shouldn't he? However much you succeed through lies, deception and cheating, however great or rich you become, - even if you get catapulted to the status of a king, God is sure to give him the just rewards for his crimes and sins. Even though this Brahmin has now gained the power of a king, of what use is it? If he should stand, somebody should help him. As a Kannada adage says, "You are condemned to eat what you have cooked!" Bhatta is now eating the fruits of his own sins. Some may appear to be successful for a moment by his lies, deception and cheating; but look at what happens to them at the end! What if he is the husband of the King's niece? What if he is the *de facto* king of the place? Or even God? Bhatta has now realised that his old position in poverty was far happier than his present life in the palace!

On the one hand, the King would not allow him peace. Now and then he would call him "God! My God!" And then bring before him some knotty problems of administration or litigation. He had to go and help in settling the differences between the Baira king and

the Banga ruler. But what could he do? Wherever he had to go, he needed to be carried as so much of a head-load! There was no way out! He yet would go and act as the mediator.

In the palace he convened a meeting to discuss and decide how best administration of the kingdom should be conducted in future. There it was resolved to conform to the prevalent custom of worship of gods and deities, honour the words of deities regarding rituals and proprieties, customary honours and privileges according to status and caste hierarchies, protect the endowments and donations made to men and institutions. It was resolved to abide by the decisions so taken and ensure that it brooked no transgression whatever. Anybody violating the customary rules and regulations should be expelled from the community. Everyone was directed to live according to the Truth so defined. If anyone defied these codes and injunctions, he would be excommunicated, with no claim on even extinguished fire, or even on a hot lump of lime to go with betel leaves and nuts. Such a strict code was resolved upon!

* * *

the Hanga rulers. But what could he do? Wherever he had to go, he needed to be carried as so much of a dead-weight. There was no way out. He yet would go and act as the mediator.

In the palace he convened a meeting with gusto, and decide how best administration of the kingdom should be conducted in future. There it was resolved to condone with the several systems of worship of gods and deities, honour the words of deities regarding rituals and proprieties, customary laws and privileges according to status and caste hierarchies, as also the whims and fancies and donations made to men and institutions. It was resolved as a whole by the decisions so taken, and ensure that it involved no transgression whatever. Anybody violating the customary rules and regulations should be expelled from the community. Everyone was directed to live according to the Train so defined. If anyone defied these codes and injunctions, he would be excommunicated, with no claim on even a extinguished fire, or even on a hut large of lime to go with betel leaves and nuts. Such a strict code was resolved upon.

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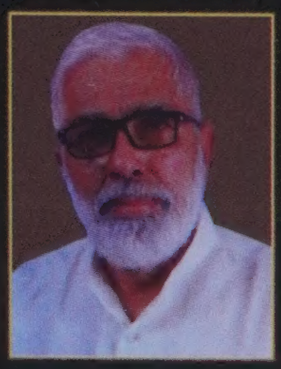

B. Surendra Rao

B. Surendra Rao (born 1948) is a retired Professor of History, Mangalore University, where he had taught between 1982 and 2008. He had earlier taught at Vivekananda College, Puttur, between 1973 and 1982. He was Sectional President (Modern Indian History) of Indian History Congress at Kolkata (2001) and was also a Member of the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. Among his more recent works are *Bunts in History and Culture* (2010), which has also been translated into Kannada and *Ways and Byways of History : Musings on History and Historical Writings* (2015). He and Prof. S. Chandrashekar of Bangalore University have edited *Karnatakada Arthika mattu Samaajika Charitreya kelavu Nelegalu* in 14 volumes (2018). Prof. Surendra Rao is a recipient of Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Award (2015).

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K. Chinnappa Gowda (born 1955) is a retired Professor of Kannada, Mangalore University and was, for a while the Vice Chancellor of Karnataka Folklore University. Among his more important works are *Bhutaradhane : Jaanapdeeya Adhyayana, Samskriti Siri, Jalata, Mask and the Message*. He was one of the editors, along with Lauri Honko, Anneli Honko and Viveka Rai, of *Siri Epic as Performed by Gopala Naika* (2 vols) He has visited Tubingen (Germany) Turku (Finland) and Waseda (Japan) Universities on various academic assignments. He is a recipient of many prestigious awards.

B. Surendra Rao and K. Chinnappa Gowda have together translated an anthology of modern Tulu poems, *Ladle in a Golden Bowl* (2017), an anthology of Tulu folk work songs and dance songs, *When Moonlight is Very Hot* (2018), a collection of Tulu Folktales, *The Rainboy*(2018), translated into English D.K. Chowta's Tulu novel, *Mittabail Yamunakka* (2017) and have done the English translation of the first Tulu novel of 1936, *Sati Kamale* (2019).

The author of the present work, Polali Sheenappa Heggade, was a nationalist, a Gandhian and a freedom fighter, who had been duly incarcerated by the British for his nationalistic fervour and activities. He was also a passionate researcher of Tulu history and culture, and *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* which he published in 1935 was a unique work, the structure and content of which are highlighted by the translators, Prof. B. Surendra Rao and Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda. Their cryptic description of the work as 'Story with wings... flying into the realm of the fable' is very meaningful, even metaphorically. They show how "*Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* is a rich pulp of historical and cultural description, centred on events, institutions, cults and practices" of Tulunadu.

B.A. Viveka Rai

We plan to sponsor translations of books from other languages to Tulu and of Tulu works into other languages. This excellent translation of Polali Sheenappa Hegde's *Mithya Nārāyaṇa Kathe* as Tale of Narayana the Impostor is one such effort.

A.C. Bhandari

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